

Initial guidance on action short of strike action marking instruction (England)

Introduction and background to the instruction

1. This guidance is intended to support members in implementing the NASUWT's action short of strike action instruction on marking and assessment policies in schools. The instruction makes clear that members must not comply with marking and assessment policies which generate excessive workload and/or have not been agreed with the NASUWT.
2. The NASUWT does not take the issuing of an instruction focused on marking lightly. The Union is committed to ensuring that its action short of strike action is consistent with work in schools to promote high educational standards and acknowledges fully that marking policies and practices play a critical role in this regard.
3. The Union has not produced a model marking policy given that it would be difficult for such a policy to take meaningful account of the specific circumstances and educational priorities of every school. However, this guidance sets out the key principles that the NASUWT expects should be reflected in all schools' policies and practices.
4. In developing this guidance, the NASUWT has taken full account of existing good practice in schools, the expectations of the school accountability regime and researched evidence on the ways in which marking and feedback can contribute effectively to pupil progress and achievement.

5. Specifically, the NASUWTs action short of strike action instruction on marking and assessment policies applies to policies that have not been agreed with the NASUWT and which:

- specify the frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback;
- require teachers to provide a written record of verbal feedback provided to pupils;
- require teachers to provide detailed written feedback on all occasions when they are reviewing pupils' work or acknowledging their efforts;
- require teachers to engage in detailed marking (e.g. 'dialogic', 'deep', 'triple', or 'quality' marking) for every piece of written work completed by pupils;
- use information collected through book scrutiny exercises, often referred to as 'book looks', to form judgements about the effectiveness of teachers' practice; and
- are not sustainable in terms of teachers' workloads resulting in the majority of teachers' marking being carried outside Planning Preparation and Assessment time.

These issues are considered in further detail below.

The importance of effective approaches to marking and feedback

6. The NASUWT is clear that marking and feedback represents an important dimension of effective teaching practice. Marking and feedback:

- ensures that teachers and parents understand where pupils are with their learning and what they need to do to improve further;
- informs interventions to make sure that pupils' progress is on track; and
- supports pupils' evaluation of their own learning.

7. The NASUWT therefore accepts that it is reasonable for schools to seek to establish frameworks and systems for marking and feedback. However, it is critical to ensure that arrangements for marking and feedback do not create unacceptable and unnecessary workload burdens for teachers. The NASUWT has implemented its instruction on marking to protect teachers from attempts by schools to impose such arrangements.
8. It is important to note that it is entirely possible for schools to establish expectations in respect of marking that not only meet the educational goals set out above and are recognised by inspectors as contributing to effective teaching and learning, but also limit workload burdens on teachers. Where such arrangements are not in place, the NASUWT's action instruction on marking provides a means by which more appropriate marking and feedback practices can be introduced.
9. While schools will want to implement whole school policies and systems for marking and feedback, it must be acknowledged that practice will need to vary according to the age and ability of pupils as well as by subject or area of learning. Therefore, in seeking to agree acceptable approaches to marking, members will need to use their professional judgement to advocate frameworks that take into account the particular contexts within which marking is undertaken. Nevertheless, regardless of these differing contexts, practice must reflect the considerations set out below if it is to be regarded as acceptable by the NASUWT.

Ofsted's expectations

10. In March 2015, Ofsted published an updated version of its Ofsted inspections - clarification for schools document.¹ This document confirms Ofsted's expectations of key features of policy and practice in schools. In relation to marking and feedback, it states:

*'Ofsted recognises that marking and feedback to pupils, both written and oral, are important aspects of assessment. However, **Ofsted does not** (Ofsted's emphasis) expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback; these are for the school to decide through its assessment policy. Marking and feedback should be consistent with that policy, which may cater for different subjects and different age groups of pupils in different ways, in order to be effective and efficient in promoting learning.'*

11. On the specific issue of recording oral feedback given to pupils, the document is clear that:

*'...while inspectors will consider how written and oral feedback is used to promote learning, **Ofsted does not** (Ofsted's emphasis) expect to see any written record of oral feedback provided to pupils by teachers.'*

12. *Ofsted inspections* - clarification for schools further confirms that marking policies and expectations in schools must avoid imposing workload intensive and burdensome requirements on teachers:

'If it is necessary for inspectors to identify marking as an area for improvement for a school, they will pay careful attention to the way

¹ Ofsted (2015). *Ofsted inspections - clarification for schools*. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/415123/Ofsted_inspections_clarification_for_schools.doc, accessed on 17.04.15.

recommendations are written to ensure that these do not drive unnecessary workload for teachers.'

13. NASUWT members should therefore resist any attempt to justify the imposition of onerous or workload intensive marking arrangements on the basis that Ofsted expects such systems to be in place and that schools will suffer detrimental inspection outcomes if they are not.

Types and frequency of marking and feedback

14. It is essential that whole school marking and assessment policies recognise that feedback to pupils can be given verbally or in writing and that both forms can be equally valid. Written feedback or marking should therefore not necessarily be given greater status or emphasis than verbal feedback. For some forms of learning and for the youngest pupils, the greater part of feedback given to pupils is likely to be verbal rather than in writing. Depending on context and the professional judgement of teachers, verbal feedback can also be given to pupils individually as well as collectively.
15. While it is acknowledged to be important that pupils are given opportunities to respond to this feedback, there is no need for policies to require that teachers provide written evidence of instances of verbal feedback given to pupils. However, teachers will want to make records of verbal feedback given to pupils if their professional judgement indicates that this would be appropriate.
16. Systems in place to acknowledge the written work and efforts of pupils should not require that these acknowledgements include detailed written comments. Instead, pupils' work can be recognised appropriately and effectively by means of ticks, agreed symbol systems, stickers or stamps the use of which does not impose onerous burdens.

17. The NASUWT recognises that the provision of more detailed written feedback to pupils can have an important role to play in supporting their learning. Such marking is often referred to as:
- dialogic marking;
 - deep marking;
 - triple marking; or
 - quality marking.
18. This marking can take various forms but tends to be characterised by the provision of detailed written feedback by teachers that reflects pupils' progress towards relevant learning objectives. Pupils are then expected to provide a written response confirming that they have understood this feedback and describing how they intend to respond.
19. This feedback is usually expected to include positive feedback on pupils' progress and highlight areas for future development. Practices of this type are often described as 'two stars and wish' or 'www (what went well)/ebi (even better if)', although there are a wide variety of terms used to describe this approach to marking across the school system. Teachers may provide further commentary based on pupils' responses.
20. The NASUWT has become increasingly concerned by cases in which teachers are expected to engage in this form of marking to an excessive extent. The NASUWT's attention has been drawn to some schools in which marking of this type is expected for all completed pieces of pupils' written work.
21. Schools' policies should therefore take account of the fact that periodic rather than routine marking of this nature should provide sufficient opportunities for teachers to provide effective written feedback to pupils. Policies should take account of the fact that in some subject

areas in secondary schools where teachers are responsible for a relatively large number of pupils, it will be necessary to adjust expectations in respect of detailed marking accordingly.

22. In establishing reasonable whole-school expectations on the use of marking of this nature, schools should ensure that there is sufficient flexibility to allow teachers to adopt approaches that are best suited to the requirements of different subjects.
23. It should also be recognised that for some pupils or in some subject areas, marking of this nature will not be appropriate. These considerations should be reflected clearly in schools' policies.

Monitoring marking and written feedback

24. Schools often establish arrangements to monitor the quality of marking and its compliance with relevant policies. For example focusing on whether the teacher has used the correct coloured pens to mark the work rather than how the pupil is progressing, in effect monitoring the teacher rather than the pupil.
25. Some schools periodically collect samples of pupils' written work to monitor compliance with marking policies. Such practices are often described as 'book scrutinies', 'book audits' or 'book looks'. The NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions confirm that any information collected through book scrutiny exercises that has not been agreed during the performance management planning meeting cannot be used to form judgements about the professional effectiveness of teachers.
26. Further advice and guidance about performance management, including how the Union's action short of strike action instructions can be used to secure acceptable performance management

arrangements, can be found at
www.nasuwt.org.uk/performancemanagement.

Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time

27. Teachers have a contractual entitlement to guaranteed PPA time. The NASUWT's action short of strike action instructions seek to ensure that teachers are provided with this time. Teachers' contracts and the NASUWT instructions also set out the terms on which PPA time must be made available.
28. PPA time is self-directed time in which teachers have the opportunity to undertake tasks including assessing the work of the pupils for whom they are responsible. Marking therefore represents an entirely appropriate use of PPA time.
29. The extent to which PPA time is sufficient for teachers to complete the majority of their marking provides a useful approximate guide to the reasonableness of marking burdens. If, despite using PPA time for marking, teachers are required to spend excessive additional time marking pupils' work, it is likely to be the case that the marking and assessment policies are placing unacceptable burdens on teachers and there is need for this to be addressed through agreed amendments to schools' policies'.

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