

Introduction

At every level in our school we have been increasingly aware of the pressures on staff time from marking learners' work, and how this can have a negative impact on teacher welfare, without having a proportionately positive impact upon learner progress and well-being. Two years ago, learner voice sessions clearly revealed how learners saw the feedback given to them. Although they appreciated the efforts of their teachers it became apparent that some teachers had cracked the code and engaged the children in driving their own learning forward through their comments, both written and oral, while others had invested time in marking but with little return from the learner. At the same time, one of our staff triads had been trialling some more innovative forms of feedback and were excited by the results. They had attended continuing professional development (CPD) at a local school and had done a literature review regarding effective methods for feedback. They were confident that some of these methods could be utilised in our school policy and actions. This path initially began with a whole-school 3–19 focus during the first year; during the following two years we developed feedback in our secondary sector.

Growth Mindset and Metacognition

It became clear that a new, coherent whole-school approach was needed. Improving teacher feedback would increase learner engagement in their own learning and would also enable the learners to give more useful feedback to their peers as modelled by their teachers. Supporting the learner to take more control and ownership of their learning would empower the learner and have a positive impact on their behaviour, as well as their progress in their learning. Crucially, it would also contribute to the four purposes. In addition to this a focused approach would improve staff well-being since there would be a positive impact from their hard work, and their marking would be focused on set tasks, thereby reducing their workload.

A whole-school staff development programme was planned in order to improve teacher feedback and hence improve learner response and engagement. One of our areas for development in our school self-evaluation was to encourage the independence of our learners, building their responsibility and increasing their say in their own learning. When both teachers and learners develop an understanding of how learners learn and recognise areas for improvement, then learners can begin to set goals for themselves and peers, and build resilience when faced with a challenge. Improving learners' engagement with teachers' feedback and hence their learning by implementing further whole-school professional learning on feedback would be one step. We began by inviting an external trainer who provided a day's session on growth mindset and, as a facet of that, metacognition.

This professional learning was accompanied by ongoing in-house support, learning walks, learner voice sessions and monitoring of learner work at a departmental level and by the senior leadership team (SLT) and staff meetings. The staff participated in an intensive course tailored to meet our school's needs delivered by an external agency. The principles for all our disciplines was to write constructive and specific feedback that both ensured that the learner focused on improving that particular piece of work and that supported their longer-term development. Many different techniques were suggested but the principles remained the same. We also discussed the difficulties experienced with attaining good-quality peer assessment and how this related to the feedback modelled by teachers. Departmental meetings and staff meetings included time to discuss these strategies and seek support during the year. Later that year, successful practitioners from a wide range of disciplines in the school were invited to share their tried and tested methods, showing how our learners were actively closing the gaps in their learning when challenged.

Throughout this period, we were trialling and evaluating different methods with a view to rewriting our school feedback policy. Monitoring of learners' work was undertaken by department leaders, in collaboration with their line managers from the SLT. This enabled us to understand feedback from different perspectives and was amplified by the contribution of learners in the learner voice sessions. Our new feedback policy was completed at the end of this first year and included numerous suggestions for feedback which extended the concepts of assessment for learning. We were also acutely aware of the need for the new policy to be applied by every department, and following discussions and monitoring with department leaders, we included both oral and written feedback in the policy.

In March that same year, the Estyn report for the school (March 2019) confirmed the findings of the SLT that most teachers provided valuable oral feedback on learners' work and effort and that many teachers provided purposeful written feedback on learners' work, which enabled learners to know how to improve. However, in a minority of cases, teachers' comments were not specific enough for learners to know exactly what they needed to do to improve their work.

Munudau Mwy

The Estyn report gave us a clear way forward. The following year, in September 2019, staff further familiarised themselves with the new assessment policy and were introduced to our own version of the dedicated improvement reflection time (DIRT) model for reflection – Munudau Mwy. This would lead to the enhancement of the learners' metacognition, and would secure dedicated reflection time in class throughout the previous year, where the learner was actively engaged with the feedback and learning continuum, techniques involving reflection and metacognition were discussed and trialled. This led to Munudau Mwy, where learners were required to think before responding, to focus on thinking about their work, and to respond purposefully to feedback and improving the standard of their work. This was presented as a whole-school initiative, presenting a method that could be conducted

at any time during the lesson. Templates were developed in some disciplines where appropriate, as well as metacognitive tasks achieved by crafting probing questions that scaffolded the process when necessary.

Throughout this past year, regularly scheduled monitoring of learner work and learner voice sessions revealed that many disciplines had engaged learners in an effective learning dialogue where assessment was embedded and used to identify whether further support was needed and the next steps for learners' progress. Learners were challenged to increase the depth or breadth of their knowledge and/or understanding and/or sophistication. Where necessary, the learner had been required to repeat or reuse the knowledge/skills in a new or more challenging context to stretch them further. This focused on moving the learning forward by understanding the learning that had already taken place and using it to ensure that each learner was challenged appropriately. Another characteristic of the effective teacher was a positive learning environment where mistakes were an opportunity for discovery, where learners had effective working relationships with peers and teachers alike, and where the needs of the individual learner were recognised. There were also reflection tasks that were set appropriately for the learners both to develop an understanding of how they learned and to recognise the strategies they used to solve problems so that they could adopt and adapt these in other more challenging contexts in order to progress further.

By monitoring learners' work and learner voice sessions, as well as joining learning walks, we were able to see/observe that learners were receiving a specified time during the scheme of work in order to reflect on their learning. The learners' ability to understand how they learned improved with successive reflection sessions and was well documented in most disciplines, demonstrating that we were on the right path to develop strong metacognitive skills in our learners. Most of the disciplines demonstrated an effective use of oral and written feedback to both support a learning dialogue with the learners and move the learning forward.

Communication

The last key step for us was to communicate learner progress in a succinct and meaningful manner to parents/carers so that they could support learner progression in school and at home, with added benefits for learner well-being. Communication with parents/carers was improved by advising the teaching staff and monitoring the content of written reports to remove descriptions of the topics and activities studied by the learner unless they were needed in order to exemplify each individual learner's progress, strengths, achievements, areas for improvement and, if relevant, any barriers to learning. In addition, staff were strongly encouraged and supported to avoid jargon, write information using language accessible to the parents/carers and include concise, constructive and specific longer-term targets directed to the learner to move the learning forward. Other aspects of the report, including adapting the ethos and Cymreictod grades in order to issue an Effort grade which is also an easier concept

for both the learner and the parent/carer to grasp, were introduced in order to help parents and carers interpret the feedback.

The litmus test proved to be the closure of schools in March 2020, the ability of our learners to work and respond effectively to distance learning, and the clarity of our communication with parents/carers to ensure sufficient accessibility for online reporting. The response of our learners online was incredible when coupled with the unexpected turn of events. Learners were only introduced to Microsoft Teams the week before lockdown, and despite this short timescale, many learners proved to be resilient and moved their learning forward, responding positively to the challenge. Using the guidance provided online and messaging their teachers when required, the majority of learners submitted their work successfully, and during the check-in and catch-up sessions commented on how they benefitted from working at their own pace.

The challenge for us in the autumn term will be to secure the engagement of all our learners in online learning while maintaining a blended approach – there is no going back now. We will also be trialling different methods in order to achieve an online feedback process comparable to that achieved in face-to-face learning so that a learning dialogue can continue remotely between the teacher and each individual learner. We've had an excellent response from parents/carers during this period for the reports delivered electronically, and we will continue to review this in light of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill and any other upcoming reforms that improve the collaboration of parents/carers in their children's learning.