

Mentor handbook | S12 | Feedback

Study

Get yourself into a strong position to mentor your teacher by working through the following:

Key takeaways for this module

Your teacher can help pupils to improve their work and deepen their understanding by:

- > Offering feedback which guides pupils how to improve and gives them the opportunity to apply it.
- > Making their approach to feedback efficient and sustainable for them.
- > Encouraging pupils to monitor and regulate their own learning.

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Teaching challenge:

Mr Jones assesses pupils' work regularly and adapts his teaching in response to their needs. He wants to ensure that the feedback he offers pupils genuinely helps them to improve their work and deepen their understanding. He finds the variety of kinds of feedback available overwhelming and he worries that the amount of time it will take him to provide detailed feedback will be unsustainable in the long term.

Key idea:

Feedback can make a significant difference to pupils' understanding and outcomes if it guides pupils to improve and is sustainable for the teacher.

Effective feedback is specific, usable and encouraging

Mr Jones must ensure that his feedback offers pupils precise guidance about how they can improve. Often feedback focuses on the immediate task, but it is more helpful to link feedback about the immediate task to feedback about the subject or the process of learning. This ensures that pupils can apply it to future tasks (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback should provide specific guidance in how pupils improve their work: lengthy, complicated and excessively detailed feedback can be overwhelming to pupils and therefore counter-productive since they may be unable to act upon it (DFE, 2016).

Ensuring pupils respond to feedback is as important as the content of the feedback (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback may be ineffective if pupils find it discouraging or conclude that they are unable to act upon it (Wiliam, 2011). For example, pupils' responses to feedback can also vary depending on a range of social factors, including their age as well as the message the feedback contains. Realising this, Mr Jones needs to

frame feedback in such a way as to ensure that pupils seek and welcome it, for example identifying specific strengths and encouraging pupils to keep up their effort in relation to these. Moreover, feedback should focus on improving pupils' work, for example "remember to write formally in business letters: check and remove any abbreviations in formal writing". In contrast, if it focuses on pupils' personal strengths and weaknesses ("you're usually good at writing letters"), this can lead them to worry more about how they are perceived by others than about how they can improve (Hattie and Timperley, 2007). He also needs to give them time and opportunities to act upon formative feedback, for example in the lesson after written feedback has been given.

Given the importance of these elements of feedback, Mr Jones realises he will need to be careful about his use of peer and self-generated feedback. If these strategies are to be effective, they need to meet the same criteria as any other feedback: offer specific guidance and encourage further effort. If they do not, they are likely to be ineffective.

In summary, feedback should:

- > Be specific.
- > Focus on immediate and subsequent improvements in work and effort.
- > Encourage pupils to act upon it.

Feedback needs to be sustainable for teachers

Mr Jones worries that providing detailed feedback could easily come to take up a huge amount of his time. He is reassured to learn that there is no specific evidence supporting the provision of extensive written feedback and very limited evidence about the effectiveness of written marking as a specific means of providing feedback (Gibson et al., 2015). Within the limits of his school's marking and feedback policy, this frees him to provide the guidance that pupils need in the most efficient manner possible. He could work with colleagues to identify efficient approaches to marking and alternative approaches to feedback, for example, by giving pupils feedback through a model, through a verbal comment, or by providing feedback to the whole class. He should only record data from feedback when it is useful for improving pupil outcomes.

Feedback and self-regulation

Feedback can help pupils to take a greater role in their learning. Feedback allows pupils to better plan, monitor and evaluate their current performance and understanding. If pupils have a good grasp of their current performance and a clear sense of their goal, then they should increasingly be able to judge how well they are doing and regulate their learning by identifying what they need to do to improve.

Teachers can help by explicitly teaching pupils metacognitive strategies linked to subject knowledge. For example, helping pupils to effectively plan, monitor and evaluate their writing through sharing what an effective final piece of writing looks like and modelling the thinking and steps undertaken to produce it. Teachers can then facilitate feedback on how effectively pupils have planned, monitored and evaluated their work: "You missed out step two in the plan. Make sure you select three pieces of evidence you are going to use in your essay". This feedback develops pupil metacognition in relation to this particular task. These strategies can develop pupil independence and academic success (EEF, 2017).

Nuances and caveats

Not all feedback is effective. Additional feedback may not support pupils to improve further: the crucial question when considering whether feedback is effective is whether it leads to the desired improvement. It is not about the quantity offered or the way it is delivered.

Feedback is just one way to help pupils improve: the priority is to teach effectively initially then to use feedback where pupils have struggled, rather than relying on feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

The evidence on feedback is sometimes inconclusive and even contradictory (Kluger & de Nisi, 1996). Mr Jones will need to adapt the guidance on effective feedback to suit the subject he is teaching and the needs of his class. It could be useful to speak to colleagues who teach the same subject about such adaptations.

SELECT A DEVELOPMENT AREA

Consider the development areas for this module (below). Then make a note of the area you plan to zoom in on and when you plan to visit so you can observe your teacher in this area. Familiarise yourself with the focused development areas. You will select one later when you observe your teacher.

Development areas	Focused development areas
Specific feedback that encourages effort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher provides feedback that is specific and can be actioned by the pupils. > Teacher provides feedback that can be applied in upcoming tasks. > Teacher ensures pupils have time to understand feedback and a means to respond to it.
Efficient feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher uses whole-class or group feedback where possible to address common misconceptions, gaps in knowledge and errors the class are making. > Teacher uses verbal feedback or prompts where possible to ensure feedback is timely but not time consuming.
Feedback and self-monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher supports pupils to check their work and improve. > Teacher uses self and peer assessment thoughtfully and provides support for pupils so that it is effective.

EXAMPLES OF PRECISE TARGETS

If your teacher is..	Then your precise target might be...
Not doing it at all...	Plan feedback that explains to pupils specifically what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve.
Doing it but needs some improvement...	Plan feedback that explains to pupils specifically what they are doing well, what they need to do to improve, s accompanied by an actionable task to put this feedback into practice.
Doing it well and needs some stretch...	Plan feedback that explains to pupils specifically what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve, accompanied by a task to put this feedback into practice and plan a model of how pupils should action this feedback.

Observe

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's previous target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

Thinking about the development area you have selected for this module, what is your teacher already doing well in this area? Which focused development area best aligns with what your teacher needs to get better at? What one precise target (bite-sized action) might you work with them on during your mentor meeting?

REMINDER: You can choose to stick with this previous target if they have not made enough progress. When moving on to a new precise target, you can select one from the table above or, if this doesn't fit your teacher's needs, you can write your own.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?' and 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?'

Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:

- > Consider carefully whether feeding back or intervening within lessons with individuals and small groups would be more efficient and effective than planning different lessons for different groups of pupils.
- > Focus on specific actions for pupils and provide time for pupils to respond to feedback.
- > Scaffold self-assessment by sharing model work with pupils, highlighting key details.
- > Think carefully about how to ensure feedback is specific and helpful when using peer or self-assessment.
- > Use verbal feedback during lessons and in place of written feedback after lessons where possible.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'feedback' stage of instructional coaching.

References

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