

## Symbol Marking - Early Years

**By Claire Martindale**

A whole school marking policy was recently updated in our school. As an Academy Trust staff worked closely with the CEO, Heads of School and other staff to devise a marking policy that was positive to the reader, was easily understood by the children in school, was clear to 'all' staff and stakeholders, that supported work life balance and was used within all stages of the Primary school.

To have a greater impact on outcomes school exercise books were designed and published with a child version of the marking policy inside of the front cover.

Within the Early Years, symbol marking is introduced to the children at the beginning of Autumn two when children in Reception become familiar with working in books. The codes are easily understandable such as a 'C' for a missing capital letter, or a 'dot' for a missing full stop. We use a simple star when we see something used well – so a '\*C' would mean 'I like your use of a capital here'.

When introducing the code to the pupils, the teacher would place a large copy of a child's work onto the visualiser and question children 'What do you like about this work?' When the children become familiar with what staff are looking for and what is in 'good' writing they are able to hold dialogues about their peers work at the age of four or five. This is then marked with the children using the code, as it would be in books. For example, a child might state that they can see a capital letter and a full stop. The practitioner would then mark the work with a star (\*) and the symbol capital 'C' for capital letters and a '.' (full stop). Moving on to 'something to improve' gives the children the opportunity to support each other with areas to address such as 'descenders not hanging under the line', 'ascenders not touching the top of the line' etc This would be highlighted in yellow and then modelled by the teacher below on how this is to be completed correctly. The same practice is applied by teachers in individual textbooks; however children are given time to apply their changes next to the highlighted modelling.

The majority of the work in Early Years IS given by instant verbal feedback. Reading through children's Literacy work with individuals and pointing out what is good about their work boosts individual children's confidence and ensures they see themselves as 'writers that can' – these positives are marked with a star. Staff then move on to find something to improve and something we can do to help make it better. This is highlighted in yellow pen and focusses in on what needs addressing. This is where the marking code can be incredibly helpful. We can give really clear and effective feedback using the code, that the pupils know how to implement straight away as we have modelled it and practiced it together.