

**MASTERS PROGRAMME**

<p><b>Student number:</b> xxxxxxx</p> <p><b>Module:</b> Dissertation</p> <p><b>Dissertation/Assignment Title:</b> How effective is the marking policy at Trinity Academy and to what extent can it be used as an instrument of school improvement?</p>	<p><b>Agreed Grade:</b></p> <p>A*</p> <p><b>Percentage:</b></p> <p>81</p>
<p><b>Overall Comment</b></p> <p>The study is ambitious in scope and convincing in its conclusions. In the introductory sections I was puzzled in parts by the aspects of the school that were identified as potentially significant for understanding the causes of the school's low achievement in Ofsted inspections. It is unclear why White Heritage and English as first language are identified at the outset as possible causes of low attainment. Those could be simply prejudicial asides. And what are 'academes', but this might be simply a misprint for 'academies'? Do Ofsted figures identify academies separately from other types of secondary school in respect of evidenced 'inadequacy'? It would have been useful early on to have identified more clearly the main criteria used by either the school or by Ofsted in designating the school as in need of special measures, underlying the recommendation to improve marking and feedback practice. Without light on the conditions behind the category, what can be examined, in a research sense? But the firm focus on School Improvement approach is aptly chosen, and becomes more productive as the study proceeds. It is worth noting that '<i>criteria</i>' is a plural noun; the singular is '<i>criterion</i>' (p. 13).</p>	
<p><b>Subject Knowledge</b></p> <p>The literature review is richly sourced and effectively used but clarity is sometimes weakened by repeated interleaving of discussion of a particular author's work with detailed discussion of implications for the school concerned. It is generally more effective, in such circumstances, to use a distillation of the lit. review as a resource with which to structure and develop critical discussion of collected evidence of current practice and identified scope for improvement. Thus the lit. review might more effectively have been located earlier in the study. Yet the way in which you use the review to build a 'model' that might be 'appropriate to the improvement efforts of — Academy is sound and constructive. Your ontological and epistemological identifications are a little cryptic, but essentially sound and valuable as you use them. An expanded explanation of how important such insights can be for teachers, whose role is essentially one of transacting intellectual change and development among young learners, might be something you can enlarge in the future.</p>	
<p><b>Analysis and Critique</b></p> <p>Methodology and selection of instruments is well done; links with and relevant support in the earlier theoretical section might have been made more explicit. Support from the work of experienced researchers is aptly chosen and deployed, but expressions like "to further evidence the quantitative data" (p. 41) in connection with interviews as potentially</p>	

amplification or refinement of evidence derived from questionnaires, are of doubtful use; how we obtain reliable claims (i.e. reliably backed by what can count as evidence), is more complicated than that.

Conclusions are painstakingly but comprehensively set out and show considerable and detailed understanding of what the study reveals about the school's leadership culture and practices.

**Presentation**

Clear and satisfactory in terms of language. Though not uniformly an easy read, the substantial achievement of the task completed is evident throughout.

**Advice for Future Work**

The following summary conclusion is well substantiated in the evidence contained in the study and constitutes an impressively focused and evidenced conclusion that could be of significant value in the school's attempts to remove itself from its current undesirable position.

"Improving schools must be aware of the contradiction between the hierarchical structure of schools and the idea of distributed leadership (Hatcher, 2010). ....The evidence outlined in this study shows that the school fosters non-autonomous relationships, due to the process of monitoring the marking policy as discussed below. [*The school*] must consequently create opportunities for teachers at all levels to develop their leadership capacity and implement autonomous performance management systems."

**Signed (first marker):** xxxxxxxx

**Date:** xxxxxxxx

**Moderator/ Second Marker's Comments (where applicable):**

The Introduction provides useful justification of the topic in terms of the local context, though the national context aspect needed explanation of Ofsted's insistence on a good marking policy as that is the 'lens' through which aspects of school improvement and effectiveness are to be explored. The literature, however, serves admirably to make this connection, demonstrating how the concepts are related and presenting several useful issues for consideration such as Coe's cautionary statement about assuming cause and effect relationships. With its final section on leadership, the literature review is well done. Re methodology, a sound understanding is demonstrated in regard to paradigms, the case study approach, data collection methods and remaining aspects of conducting a study. The findings might have been better presented, with some explanation between items from the first, but this does come a little later, and the discussion is both comprehensive and reflective of theory, with conclusions appropriately drawn from the data. In all, this is a very good piece of work that highlights some leadership issues at play in a challenging situation.

**Signed (Second Marker):** xxxxxxxx

**Date:** xxxxxxxx

Assignments for this module have been subjected to a moderation process to agree standards and grades awarded.

Congratulations on completing the MA Educational Leadership (Teach First). I look forward to seeing you at Graduation.

Dr Madeleine Findon (Course Leader)

	Subject Knowledge	Analysis and Critique	Presentation
A*/A  (Mark of 80 or above = A*; 70 -79 = A)	Demonstrates a highly developed understanding of relevant concepts, theories and/or research methodologies. A wide range of relevant sources, which are well understood, are deployed to support arguments.	Recognises the demands of the question providing a well-focused, relevant answer. Sets sources and viewpoints in a wide context and makes a comprehensive assessment of issues involved. Displays awareness of methodological and theoretical considerations. High levels of ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. Detailed examination of issues with reasons for conclusions clearly indicated. Persuasively argued with main issues convincingly evaluated. Some originality of thought and creativity.	Material is very well-organised and the structure complements the content. A high level of written communication with very few errors of spelling, grammar and syntax. Mastery of referencing conventions with very few errors or omissions. Appropriate length.
B  (Mark of 60 - 69)	Sound and thorough grasp of relevant concepts, theories and/or research methodologies although lacking in depth at some points. The work is supported by references to a good range of relevant sources which are used in a relevant way.	Recognises the demands of the question providing a focused, relevant answer which brings out useful points and substantiates them. A good attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts. Appreciates main issues and able to make appropriate critical points. Perceptive commentary on evidence and materials used.	Well-structured work displaying attention to the logic and development of the piece. A clear written style. Spelling, grammar and syntax are generally good. Most features of the referencing system are used correctly. Appropriate length.
C  (Mark of 50 - 59)  Pass Mark 50	Understanding of main concepts, theories and/or research methodologies is fair but lacks depth and/or breadth. There may be some gaps or areas of confusion. An adequate range of relevant source materials is used.	Although the demands of the question have been recognised, only the basic requirements are covered and there may be some irrelevant material. The attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts is competent but lacks depth and breadth. Sensible commentary on evidence and materials used though some points may be unsubstantiated.	A generally satisfactory overall structure although it may lack balance in parts or fail to integrate some material. An adequate written style which is not impaired by the occasional errors of spelling, grammar and/or syntax. The recommended referencing system is used but with some errors and omissions. Control of length may be less secure.
D  (Mark of 40 – 49)	Some evidence of reading but understanding of the subject matter is limited. The work displays major gaps in knowledge, serious misconceptions and/or factual inaccuracies.	Introduction of basic concepts and effort made to relate them to the demands of the question which have been only partially understood. Mainly descriptive with much irrelevance and unsubstantiated conclusions. No sustained analysis and an inability to apply knowledge and synthesise material. Uncritical exegesis.	Weak structure. Expression of ideas is sometimes confused or unclear. Communication may also be impaired by errors of spelling, grammar and/or syntax. Referencing marred by frequent errors and omissions. May exceed or fail to meet length requirements.
E  (Mark below 40)	Few relevant sources used. Serious gaps and/or errors in knowledge and understanding indicate that the student has failed to engage seriously with the subject matter.	The question may have been ignored or badly misunderstood. Few or none of the basic requirements of the study have been achieved. Superficial treatment of the topic much of which is descriptive, irrelevant and unsubstantiated. Lacks appropriate critical or theoretical framework.	Unstructured presentation, lacking coherence. Expression of ideas is poor. Communication may also be impaired by frequent errors of spelling, grammar and/or syntax. The recommended referencing system has not been mastered. Length requirements not met.

**80+ An outstanding piece of work**, showing total mastery of the subject-matter, with a highly developed ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. All objectives of the set work are covered, and there is evidence of critical reflection, originality of thought and creativity. The work is free of errors with a very high level of technical competence. Ideas are expressed with fluency.

**70-79 An excellent piece of work**, showing a high degree of mastery of the subject-matter, with a very well-developed ability to analyse, synthesise and apply knowledge and concepts. All major objectives of the set work are covered, and there is evidence of critical reflection. The work is free of all but very minor errors, with a high level of technical competence. Ideas are expressed with fluency.

**60-69 A good piece of work**, showing a sound and thorough grasp of the subject-matter, though lacking in the breadth and depth required for a first-class mark. A good attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts, but more limited in scope than that required for a mark of 70+. Most objectives of the work set are covered and there is some evidence of critical reflection. Work is generally technically competent. Ideas are expressed with clarity, with minor exceptions.

**50-59 A fair piece of work**, showing a grasp of major elements of the subject-matter but possibly with some gaps or areas of confusion. Only the basic requirements of the work set are covered. The attempt at analysis, synthesis and application of knowledge and concepts is superficial, with a heavy reliance on course materials. Work may contain some errors, and technical competence is at a routine level only. Little critical reflection. Some confusion in expression of ideas.

**40-49 Not of a passable level for a postgraduate programme.** A poor piece of work, showing some familiarity with the subject-matter, but with major gaps and serious misconceptions. Only some of the basic requirements of the work set are achieved. There is little or no attempt at analysis, synthesis or application of knowledge, and a low level of technical competence, with many errors. Inability to reflect critically on an argument or viewpoint. Ideas are poorly expressed and structured.

**Below 40 Work not of passable standard**, with serious gaps in knowledge of the subject-matter, and many areas of confusion. Few or none of the basic requirements of the work set are achieved, and there is an inability to apply knowledge. Technical competence is poor, with many serious errors. The level of expression and structure is very inadequate. The student has failed to engage seriously with any of the subject-matter involved.

How effective is the marking policy at Trinity Academy and to what extent can it be used as an instrument of school improvement?

A. Student

XXXXXXXX

Dissertation presented as a partial requirement for the award of MA Educational Leadership (Teach First) of the University of Warwick

Centre for Education Studies

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I would like to thank the staff at Trinity Academy for consenting to complete this study; without their willing participation in the interviews and questionnaires this research would not have been possible.

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## **Abstract**

This study focuses on Trinity Academy, a school placed in special measures in April 2015, the effectiveness of their marking policy and the extent to which this policy contributes to the school's improvement. This paper draws firstly on school effectiveness literature which identifies the features of effective marking and feedback practice, followed by school improvement literature which is used to place the marking policy within a leadership framework. Through interviews and questionnaires, this paper reveals that the marking policy at Trinity Academy is effective in some ways, yet ineffective in others. Furthermore, the implementation of the marking policy suggests that the academy shares characteristics of a school showing 'tactical improvement' and principally 'autocratic leadership'.

To conclude, this paper offers recommendations for Trinity Academy as to how they can use the marking policy to contribute to sustainable school improvement.

Recommendations prioritise staff development in terms of their collaboration, skill-set and leadership capacity. Other researchers and educators working in school improvement may wish to consider these conclusions against their own improvement strategies.

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## **Introduction**

### *National Context*

At the start of the academic year 2014-15, 25% of all academes in England had been judged as 'inadequate' by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (Education Committee, 2015). These failing schools were notified that:

In accordance with section 44 of the Education Act 2005 (as amended), Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school (Ofsted, 2015c, p4).

A school placed in special measures can receive up to 5 monitoring inspections in the 24 months following the judgement, and schools face closure if insufficient progress has been made over that period of time. It is therefore essential that 'Ofsted is able to report substantively on the school's overall progress since being made subject to special measures' (Ofsted, 2015c, p5).

### *Local context*

Trinity Academy<sup>1</sup> is a larger than average secondary school in the North East of England, which converted to academy status in 2011 following four 'Outstanding' judgements from Ofsted. The school caters for around 2000 students of which 300 make up the sixth form contingent. The number of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) and that have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) is marginally lower than national average. Despite the size of the school, almost all students are of a White British heritage and speak English as their first language. In

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<sup>1</sup> The school has been given a pseudonym to ensure anonymity throughout the dissertation.

terms of attainment, evidence from previous exam results shows that there is a gap in the level of achievement and progress between disadvantaged pupils and others (DfE, 2015). As Creemers and Reezigt (2005) suggest, external evaluation is based on student outcomes and following this disappointing gap in attainment at Trinity Academy, an Ofsted inspection deemed the school to have serious weaknesses, and was therefore placed in to special measures in April 2015.

Tasked with making quick gains in a short time frame (Chapman, 2004) to get out of special measures, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) implemented an improvement plan, or an 'action plan', which is discussed in the following section. Since April 2015, Trinity Academy has consequently encountered high levels of external pressure in the form of compressed inspection cycles and associated monitoring visits (Harris & Chapman, 2004).

### *Researcher background*

The researcher and author of this paper secured a teaching position at Trinity Academy a month before the special measures judgement, with two previous years of teaching experience. Having never taught in a special measures school or worked with such high levels of internal and external accountability measures, the researcher generated a personal interest and investment in the improvement strategies of Trinity Academy. As far as possible, the researcher mitigated the influence of being an insider researcher (Mercer, 2007); an issue that is discussed fully in the *Methodology* section of this paper.

### *Purpose and aims of the study*

Due to the extensive nature of the action plan implemented by Trinity Academy and the word limit and time constraints of this Masters dissertation, only one aspect of the action plan was considered. The marking and feedback policy was chosen to evaluate for two reasons: 1) It was identified externally, by Ofsted, as a weakness of the school and 2) School improvement literature agrees that teaching and learning, in which marking and feedback features prominently, should be a central theme of any improvement effort (Hopkins, 2013; Taylor & Ryan, 2005; Day *et al.*, 2010; Harris & Chapman, 2004).

In their inspection report, Ofsted comment on the marking and feedback of Trinity Academy:

Marking has too little impact on improving students' work over time...the work in students' books show that the quality of marking is too variable. Teachers do not always check students' work regularly or offer specific guidance on how work should be improved... some teachers do not check that students have acted to improve their work, and this hampers students' progress (Ofsted, 2015a, p 7).

Since student outcomes should be a focus of actively improving schools (Stoll & Wikeley, 1998), Trinity Academy was instructed to:

Take action to improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and supports all students to make good or better progress, by establishing greater consistency in the marking of students' work so that they receive and act upon guidance which is of a high-quality across all subjects (Ofsted, 2015a, p3).

As a result, a new marking and feedback policy was devised (see appendix 1) and implemented.

The following research questions have been devised to analyse the effectiveness of the marking and feedback policy and to assess its contribution to school improvement:

- 1) Why was the previous marking and feedback policy deemed inadequate and how was the new policy implemented?
- 2) How effective is the new marking and feedback policy and its monitoring process?
- 3) What does the implementation of the marking policy suggest about the leadership at Trinity Academy, based on Chapman's model of Leadership for Schools facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC)?
- 4) How can Trinity Academy use the marking policy to move towards sustainable school improvement according to Chapman's model of Leadership for SfCC?

These research questions will be answered with evidence collected by interviews with staff members and questionnaire responses.

This first chapter aims to clearly set out the background and aims of the study, and chapter 2 explores school effectiveness and school improvement literature which will be drawn upon to support and frame the analysis. Chapter 3 sets out the research methodology for this paper and discusses research approaches, data collection methods, issues of reliability and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, followed by chapter 5 which analyses these findings in order to answer the research questions. The final conclusions in chapter 6 will aim to contribute to the ongoing improvement efforts of Trinity Academy, and add to the existing body of school effectiveness and school improvement literature.

## **Literature review**

This review will be focusing on two fields of research: School Improvement Research (SIR) and School Effectiveness Research (SER). Coe (2009) reminds us that the 1990s saw a number of writers beginning to talk about a 'merged paradigm' between the previously separate fields of school improvement and school effectiveness research. Since the 'merger', writers such as Sammons (2007) have argued that attempts to improve schools should be informed by what we know about the characteristics of effective schools. Sceptics of the 'merger' disagree however, and writers such as Elliott (1996), Thrupp (2001) and Wrigley (2004) have seen SER as dominated by a positivist, reductionist paradigm which underestimates the importance of the social context of schooling, ignores crucial questions about values and oversimplifies educational goals (Coe, 2009). Chapman *et al.* (2015) agree in the most recent International Handbook of Educational Effectiveness and Improvement, claiming that 'simply attempting to mirror the characteristics of effective schools will not work, although it may be a necessary, albeit insufficient, part of the improvement process' (p.23).

Although Creemers and Reezigt (2005) argue the intrinsic differences between the School Effectiveness and Improvement traditions, they also note that in their orientation to outcomes, input, processes, and context in education, the two traditions also have much in common. This notion was supported by Stoll and Wikeley (1998) who made clear that school improvement efforts over the years have become more focused on effectiveness issues such as teaching and learning processes and student outcomes.

For the purpose of this literature review, the origins offered by Creemers and Reezigt (2005) will be used to distinguish between the two fields of research: 'School effectiveness is more directed to finding out "what works" in education and "why";

school improvement is practice and policy oriented and intended to change education in the desired direction' (p.1).

In order to best evaluate the marking and feedback policy of Trinity Academy, school effectiveness literature will first be critiqued, before school improvement literature is considered to locate the policy within a leadership framework. This literature review has drawn from sources that are relevant to both the national context and the context of the academy, thereby allowing a more selective and concise critique.

### **School effectiveness literature**

This review will now concentrate on school effectiveness literature with the aim to analyse 'what works and why' (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005) at Trinity Academy. The marking and feedback policy, arguably one of the key aspects of the school's action plan, was chosen as a focus of this study after reviewing school effectiveness research. Hopkins (2013) claims that it is the enhancement of the quality of teaching, rather than structural change that needs to be the central theme of any improvement strategy, and that there must be a focus on student learning (1995). Taylor and Ryan (2005), Day *et al.* (2010) and Harris and Chapman (2004) agree that any improvement efforts by a school must be located in the area of teaching and learning. Furthermore Watkins (2005) draws together recent, and therefore more relevant, studies on school effectiveness and improvement and concludes that the 'classroom effect' is greater than the 'whole school effect' in explaining students' progress. Leithwood *et al.* (2004) add that leadership comes second only to classroom instruction among school related factors that influence student outcomes.

In summary, it is the student learning that must be central to improvement strategies, hence the reason this paper will now turn its attention to the newly implemented marking and feedback policy at Trinity Academy.

### *The marking and feedback policy*

In order to analyse the marking and feedback policy, it is necessary first to define the terms 'feedback' and 'formative assessment.' Literature surrounding formative assessment highlights a 'definition issue' and Bennett (2011) argues that definitions regarding formative assessment as a process or an instrument are an 'oversimplification, since even the most carefully constructed process is unlikely to work if the instrumentation, or methodology, being used in that process is not well-suited for the intended purpose' (p.7). Black and Wiliam (1998a &1998b) are a widely cited source for strong claims concerning formative assessment and feedback, therefore their definitions for this processes will be used in this instance. Formative assessment is 'encompassing all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged' (Black and Wiliam, 1998a, p.2). The concept of 'feedback' overlaps strongly with that of formative assessment and, according to Black and Wiliam (1998b), four elements that make up the feedback process can be identified (p.48):

- 1) Data on the actual level of some measurable attribute.
- 2) Data on the reference level of that attribute.
- 3) A mechanism for comparing the two levels and generating information about the gap between them.

4) A mechanism by which the information can be used to alter the gap.

For the purpose of this paper, then, the act of marking is the 'formative assessment', and the 'feedback' is the information given to students about how to close any gaps in their learning in order to enhance their attainment. At this point it must be noted that 'feedback' is not limited to feedback through marking, it encompasses oral, written and visual feedback (Brookhart, 2008). As a result, the term 'written feedback' has been used when searching for appropriate sources to cite in this review. The effectiveness of formative assessment and feedback will now be considered.

According to school effectiveness research, for formative feedback to prove useful, it must satisfy certain criteria. Firstly, feedback must be timely (Bangert-Drowns *et al*, 1991; Airasian, 1994; Marzano, 2003). When students receive feedback soon after completing a task, they are more able to act effectively and will respond better to a higher level of challenge, which in turn will enable students to reach the next stage in their learning process more rapidly (Gardner, 2012). In a review of formative assessment literature, Bennett (2011) suggests the idea that timely and specific marking renders it effective, however this study is based only on a small number of case studies and therefore cannot be considered conclusive. Differently, Gershon (2015) places more emphasis on allowing the students adequate time to reflect on their feedback:

In the lesson when pupils get their written feedback, set aside time in which they can reflect on this, and make their first attempts at putting it in to practice. This way, you can ensure the feedback has an immediate effect and that you are on hand to offer advice and guidance to any students who are not sure what their feedback means (Gershon, 2015, p79).

Similarly, Higgins (2000) in Tangie (2015) highlight that 'some students find little time to reflect on the feedback given to them' (p.37), and are therefore unable to clarify any misconceptions.

The second criteria feedback must meet is that of clarity (Brookhart, 2008) and specificity (Bangert-Drowns *et al*, 1991; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Marzano, 2003). Hattie (2012) notes that 'teachers consider their feedback to be far more valuable than do the students, because the latter find the formers feedback confusing, non-reasoned, and not understandable' (p.122). Worse, students often think that they have understood the teachers feedback when they have not, and even when they do understand, claim to have difficulties in applying it to their learning (Nuthall, 2007; Higgins, 2000). Brookhart (2008) reminds us that 'students have different vocabularies, backgrounds and experiences, and feedback should be tailored towards these in order for it to be interpreted it as the teacher intended' (p.32). The wide range of socio-economic backgrounds at Trinity Academy made this piece of literature particularly apt for reviewing.

In terms of specific feedback, Brookhart (2008) talks about the 'Goldilocks Principle': 'Not too narrow, not too broad, but just right' (p.33), thus providing students with conceptual feedback that not only gives guidance to students about how to improve, but also gives specific suggestions about how to take concrete next steps. Tangie (2015) corroborates this view and states that 'feedback should stretch beyond simply providing information about weak and needy students and what weaknesses there are in their work and behaviour, in order to encompass concrete action towards correction and progress' (p.27). This 'specificity' allows students to identify exactly where they have succeeded and also gives them pointers towards next steps in their learning (Hattie & Timperley, 2011). Conversely, the

simplicity of offering these 'next steps' is challenged by Higgins (2000), who notes that 'the process of giving and receiving feedback is a particularly complex and problematic form of communication' (p. 2). The issues of feedback complexities are discussed more thoroughly in the following paragraphs. Contrastingly, this 'problematic form of communication' has also been labelled by Hattie (2012), as a process for teachers and students to be engaged in a continuous cycle of assessment and feedback, therefore facilitating responses to students' interpretations, misunderstandings and applications of the content of the feedback. The new marking and feedback policy at Trinity Academy does allow for this dialogue between teacher and student, as a response to teacher feedback is required by the students. Hattie and Timperley (2011) and Brookhart (2008) agree that feedback must require an active response from students therefore ensuring the feedback has been understood, and Tangie (2015) asserts that 'the very success of teacher feedback lies in the action it provokes from students' (p.40). This assertion suggests that teacher feedback will inevitably have a variable level of success, which is dependent upon a range of classroom factors, the skill set of the teacher and the background of the student since 'using feedback from teachers does not come naturally to all students' (Brookhart, 2008, p.58).

Hattie (2012) has therefore concluded that on the one hand, feedback is among the most powerful influences on achievement; on the other hand, it is among the most variable of influences.

To limit the variation of marking, which was identified by Ofsted as a weakness of Trinity Academy (2015a), the proficiency of the staff carrying out formative assessment must be considered. Bennett (2011) synthesises the literature on formative assessment, and conceptualises it as 'an activity essentially rooted in

pedagogical knowledge...as simply the process of good teaching' (p 18). On the other hand, Black and Wiliam (1998b) explain the complexities surrounding the use of formative assessment based on 'ecologically rigorous' studies by Whiting *et al.* (1995). The studies found the weaknesses of teachers' formative assessment to include the encouragement of rote learning, the lack of critical reflection on the part of the student, the learning functions being under emphasised and that personal improvement was overshadowed by competition with other students. Having highlighted the downfalls of teacher practice with formative assessment, the improvement of it must now be considered.

Bennett (2011) reflects that 'teachers need substantial knowledge to implement formative assessment effectively in classrooms. It is doubtful that the average teacher has that knowledge, so most teachers will need substantial time and support to develop it' (p.20). The staff development and training for the marking and feedback policy at Trinity Academy is discussed in the 'findings' and 'analysis' sections of this paper.

Black and Wiliam (1998b) suggest that:

Where changes have been introduced with substantial training or as an intrinsic part of a project in which teachers have been closely involved, the pace of change is slow because it is very difficult for teachers to change practices which are closely embedded within their whole pattern of pedagogy (p.19).

Ball *et al.* (2012) uphold this statement and state that 'even more experienced teachers sometimes feel oppressed by policy' (p. 64). To summarise, the final criteria that a marking policy must satisfy is that it is suitably matched to the pedagogical knowledge of the staff body.

In conclusion, formative assessment has a strong research base to support its efficacy in helping students be successful (Sanzo *et al.* 2014) and it has been reported several times as being the most influential factor in the progress made by students (Broadfoot *et al.*, 1999; Black *et al.*, 2003; Gardner, 2012). Research has shown that formative assessment, including feedback via marking, has a positive impact on student understanding and attainment (Black *et al.*, 2003), as ‘it helps the (so-called) low attainers more than the rest, and so reduces the spread of attainment whilst also raising it overall’ (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p.3). Hattie (1992) concluded that ‘the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback. The simplest prescription for improving education must be “dollops of feedback” ’ (p. 9).

Although there are authors who believe that formative assessment can be – and should be – embedded in to daily practices of a school (Sanzo *et al.*, 2014), there are others that recognise that ‘extra demands made on teachers time by formative marking may cause them to eschew it on occasion, or to feel overwhelmed’ (Gershon, 2015, p. 90). In Gardner (2012), Black and Wiliam advise that for formative assessment through marking to be effective, teachers have to ‘think carefully in framing comments on written work in order to give each student guidance on how to improve’ (p.18), which is a more time consuming and complex task than usually acknowledged. Black and Wiliam in Gardner (2012) found in their case studies that, as a result of onerous marking policies and the low skill set of staff, ‘teachers feedback to students often seemed to serve social and managerial functions, often at the expense of the learning functions’ (p. 14).

This review of school effectiveness research has shown that ‘what works’ is specific, timely feedback, and the ‘why’ relates to the enhanced learning outcomes of the students. As discussed in the review, feedback as part of formative assessment manifests itself in different forms. In the case of Trinity Academy, however, it is feedback through marking that takes priority in the improvement plan as Ofsted claimed that “Marking has too little impact on improving students’ work over time” (Ofsted, 2015a, p7).

Although Trinity Academy recognises the importance of implementing a consistent and coherent marking policy, SER has shown that the effectiveness of marking relies on the pedagogical knowledge of the staff (Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Bennett, 2011; Ball *et al.*, 2012), therefore linking to the importance of professional relationships and the empowerment of staff through professional development, which will be illustrated in the next section of this review.

#### *Drawbacks to school effectiveness research*

Having studied the literature surrounding school effectiveness and the marking policy, there is strong evidence to suggest school improvement relies on enhanced student outcomes, which are in turn generated through effective marking and feedback, which can only be provided by sufficiently professionally-developed staff.

On the other hand, Coe (2009) discredits the evidence underpinning school effectiveness literature for the following reasons. Firstly, the well-known product of SER is often a list of characteristics of effective schools which a hopeful school improver should try to imitate. However, ‘one must not assume that what works in one school will necessarily work in another’ (Coe, 2009, p.371). Moreover, there is

generally no guidance about exactly how each characteristic can be acquired if it is absent, or strengthened if it is present. 'Even if a school can manage to take on these characteristics, there is no guarantee that outcomes will improve as a result' (p.373).

Secondly, Coe questions the causality of some school effectiveness research, '[j]ust because you did X, Y, Z and P, Q, R resulted, it does not follow that X, Y, Z was the cause of the improvement' (Coe, 2009, p.369). Therefore, in relation to this study, it cannot be presumed that the improvement of Trinity Academy is solely due to the newly implemented marking and feedback policy. School improvement, as a result of further analysis, could be a result of other factors such as an improved cohort or a re-structured staff body.

Lastly, and perhaps most significantly, without any evidence about changes in achievement outcomes, an evaluation can give at best a limited picture of a programme's real impact (Coe, 2009). In other words, the effectiveness of the new marking and feedback policy at Trinity Academy cannot be measured until student outcomes can be used as evidence and, even then, we still have to refer back to the issue of presumed causality.

### **School improvement literature**

Hopkins (2001) remind us that the definition for 'school improvement' can vary. Gray (Gray *et al.* 1999) defines an improving school 'as one which secures year-on-year improvement in the outcomes of successive cohorts of similar pupils...in other words it increases its effectiveness over time' (p.5). Here, we infer that it is the outcomes that are pre-eminent, whereas Mortimore (1998) in Hopkins (2001) described school improvement as 'the process of "improving" the way a school organises, promotes

and supports learning...it includes changing aims, expectations, organisations (sometimes people), ways of learning, methods of teaching and organisational teaching' (p.12), therefore alluding that it is the process of change that is important.

Despite the many definitions of *School Improvement*, authors agree that 'the ultimate goal of school improvement must be to enhance students' progress, achievement and development' (Stoll, 1999, p504).

Turning around a failing school is viewed as a 'journey' by the literature that surrounds the field of *School Improvement*. As with any journey, it is vital to know where one is headed but also where one is beginning (Hallinger & Heck, 2011).

Many scholars have attempted to categorise the stages of a school's journey to improvement (Hopkins, 2013), in order to provide a set of strategies that are aligned with the school's 'growth state' or culture. Put simply, schools at different stages of development require different strategies not only to enhance their capacity for development, but also to provide a more effective education for their students (Hopkins, Harris & Jackson, 1997). Yet, writers such as Day *et al.* (2010) and Jackson (2000) agree that shaping an evidence-based plan that meets the needs of a particular school's context remains a challenge.

Successful leadership is widely accepted as being a key constituent in achieving school improvement (Hopkins *et al.*, 1994; Stoll & Fink, 1996), and in a study carried out by Day *et al.* (2010), the improvement of school performance was explicitly linked to changing patterns of leadership and the development of school capacity for improvement. Therefore, in order to best analyse the improvement of Trinity Academy through the use of the marking policy, it is essential to use a model that

focuses on approaches to leadership *and* other school factors that contribute to its capacity for improvement.

Due to the wide range of typologies and strategies in SIR, it has been necessary to eliminate other models for improving schools based on the relevance of their context and the applicability of the strategies they offer. For example, Hopkins, Harris and Jackson's growth states (1997) called for schools to be categorised in to either Type 1) The 'failing or ineffective school', Type 2) The 'low achieving school', or Type 3) The 'good or effective school' in order to offer appropriate strategies for improvement. Two problems arise with the use of this approach: firstly, it is difficult to categorise Trinity Academy in to one 'type' of school with the given criteria, and secondly the strategies for improvement, which include 'change at leadership level' and 'the withdrawal of external pressure and inspection', are not feasible in this instance. A different, more holistic method of categorising an improving school's position will now be analysed in order to form a conceptual framework to support further analysis.

Chapman (2004) carried out two empirically grounded research projects and one evaluation project focusing on improvement and leadership of Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC), in which 30 schools from a range of contexts participated. Four central themes, which are particularly relevant to Trinity Academy and that form the basis of the model, were the most prevalent in the three projects:

- 1) Dispersing leadership

The leadership found in the majority of schools in the projects was the more traditional, hierarchical style.

- 2) Relationship with external agents

The following extracts from the research suggest that external agencies can have a direct effect on the leadership of SfCC:

One head teacher reported that the school being categorised as possessing 'serious weaknesses' had led to a narrowing of focus and a more didactic short-termist leadership approach....and that this was not his preferred leadership style but felt compelled to subscribe to it because of pressure from Ofsted. (Chapman, 2004, p. 99)

There was a reluctance to take risks or pursue their own improvement agenda...the high levels of perceived pressure generated from external inspection seemed to be disempowering schools (Chapman, 2004, p.99)

Improvement processes tended to be underpinned by tightly prepared action plans...combined with systematic appraisal of staff competencies through systematic lesson observations. (Chapman, 2004, p.100)

### 3) Importance of social capital

The projects found schools that spoke of 'widespread collaboration', and others of a 'fragmented and balkanised individualistic teacher culture'. (Chapman, 2004, p.99)

### 4) Importance of context

The nature of improvement strategies that the school employed tended to reflect the development phase of the school. If a school had been placed in 'special measures'...the school's improvement efforts tended to focus on mechanistic and tactical (Harris 2000) strategies aimed at generating short term gains.....this response to external pressure is unsurprising as the school must demonstrate 'quick gains' within a short time-frame. (Chapman, 2004, p.100)

As a result of the projects, Chapman deduced that:

In order to develop leadership approaches that are most likely to generate successful improvement...we must consider two important points. First, significant attention must be paid to what works for a school at a particular

stage of development. Second, we need to develop a deep understanding of the transition between the development phase and the nature of leadership that is most likely to support successful movement from one phase to the next (Chapman, 2004, p.96).

In order to do this, Chapman created 2 typologies that merge to create a model of leadership for SfCC. These typologies will now be studied in detail.

*A typology of leadership in Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances*

	Autonomous professional relationships	Non-autonomous professional relationships
Collaborative teacher culture	Dispersed leadership	Semi-dispersed leadership
Individualised teacher culture	<i>Laissez-faire/failed heroic leadership</i>	Autocratic/'heroic' leadership

**Figure 1: A typology of leadership in SfCC.**

*Teacher culture*

Sergiovanni (1992) reminds us that leadership is not just about leaders; it is about followers, which include staff at all levels of the school (Jackson, 2000). Dominant themes which surround SIR and teacher culture, include building relationships and

trust (Hopkins, 1995; Day *et al.* 2010; Chapman & Allen, 2006; Hargreaves, 2001), and a focus on collaboration and staff development (Day *et al.*, 2010; Hopkins *et al.*1994; Gray *et al.*, 1999). These factors contribute towards a school rich in social capital, which serves to generate strong networks and collaborative relations among its members and stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2001). This collaborative culture is argued to be the result of effective timetabling and suitable training (Hopkins, Harris & Jackson, 1997).

On the other hand, the difficulty of collaborating effectively must not be overlooked. According to Friend (2000) 'the belief that more collaboration means better outcomes can lead collaboration to be viewed as an 'expectation' instead of a 'legitimate professional responsibility' (p.31), therefore devaluing the work completed together.

Hargreaves (1994) also warns of the danger of 'contrived collegiality' as opposed to collaboration, when meetings become 'administratively regulated, compulsory, implementation-oriented, fixed in time and space, and predictable' as opposed to being focused on development and creativity' (Datnow, 2011, p.148). Whilst few would argue the benefits of collaboration on teacher culture, Hargreaves (1994) and Datnow (2011) make us question the importance placed upon collaboration in this typology of leadership.

### *Professional relationships*

It is now more than twenty years since leadership was identified as one of the key components of 'good schools' by Ofsted who stated that, without exception, 'the most important single factor in the success of these schools is the quality of the leadership of the head' (Harris *et al.* 2003, p. 56). However, Harris *et al.* (2003) also

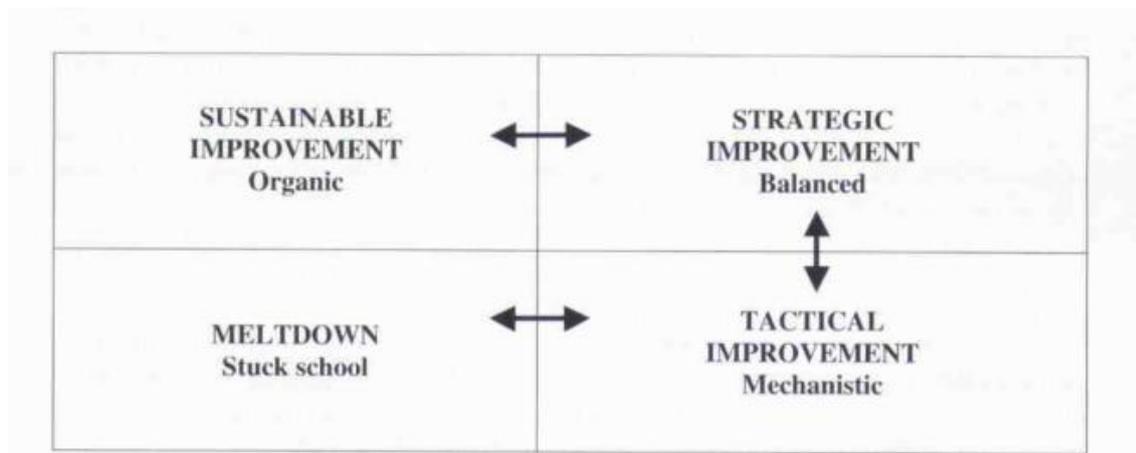
argue against non-autonomous relationships and claim that ‘although leadership is essential for successful school improvement, the leadership function does not necessarily rest exclusively with the head or principal’ (p.56). Similarly, Jackson (2000) believes that ‘expanding leadership capacity, and therefore generating autonomous relationships, rather than focusing on the characteristics of ‘The Leader’, should be a focus in actively improving schools’ (p.65).

Simply put, ‘the hierarchical structure of schools works against multilevel access to policy debate and decision making’ (Manthei, 1992, p.15), thus isolating and dividing teachers, and devaluing the knowledge and expertise that they possess (Grogan, 2013). Wiles (2008) supports this notion as he states that, rather, ‘classroom teachers are the key to all curriculum work and must be fully and openly involved in the development of school programs’ (p.10).

However, there is a problem when measuring the extent to which a school fosters autonomous professional relationships. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) consider that leadership in schools remains hierarchical despite the use of terms which might suggest a more distributed approach. Hatcher (2010) studies this contradiction between the hierarchical structure of schools and the idea of distributed leadership, suggesting that despite schools seeming to embrace a distributed structure, the traditional hierarchy still, at times, prevails. This research suggests that deducing the nature of professional relationships of Trinity Academy is a more demanding and complex task than it seemed on the outset.

*An improvement typology for Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances*

The following typology, based on the relationship between a school improvement and Ofsted categorisation, suggests a link between the development phase of a school, and the nature of improvement strategies likely to be undertaken (Chapman, 2004, p102).



**Figure 2: An improvement typology for SfCC.**

The characteristics of each vignette in the typology will now be briefly outlined according to Chapman (2004):

### *Meltdown*

Schools in this vignette would be in educational crisis and would have been placed in Special Measures. Professional relationships are fractured and teachers survive through individual strength. The knowledge and skills base of staff is insufficient, and there are few professional development opportunities. There is an absence of structured leadership.

### *Tactical improvement*

A school in this vignette is recognised as Special Measures and there are high levels of external accountability (local authority, HMI visits). The relationships are non-autonomous and staff have an individualised culture, with a low knowledge and skill base. 'High levels of monitoring, implemented by autocratic leadership, pervade all areas of school life in an attempt to minimise variations in practices' (p. 103). There will be either a new head teacher or a long term serving member of staff that has to change their own and the school's practices radically in a short space of time.

### *Strategic improvement*

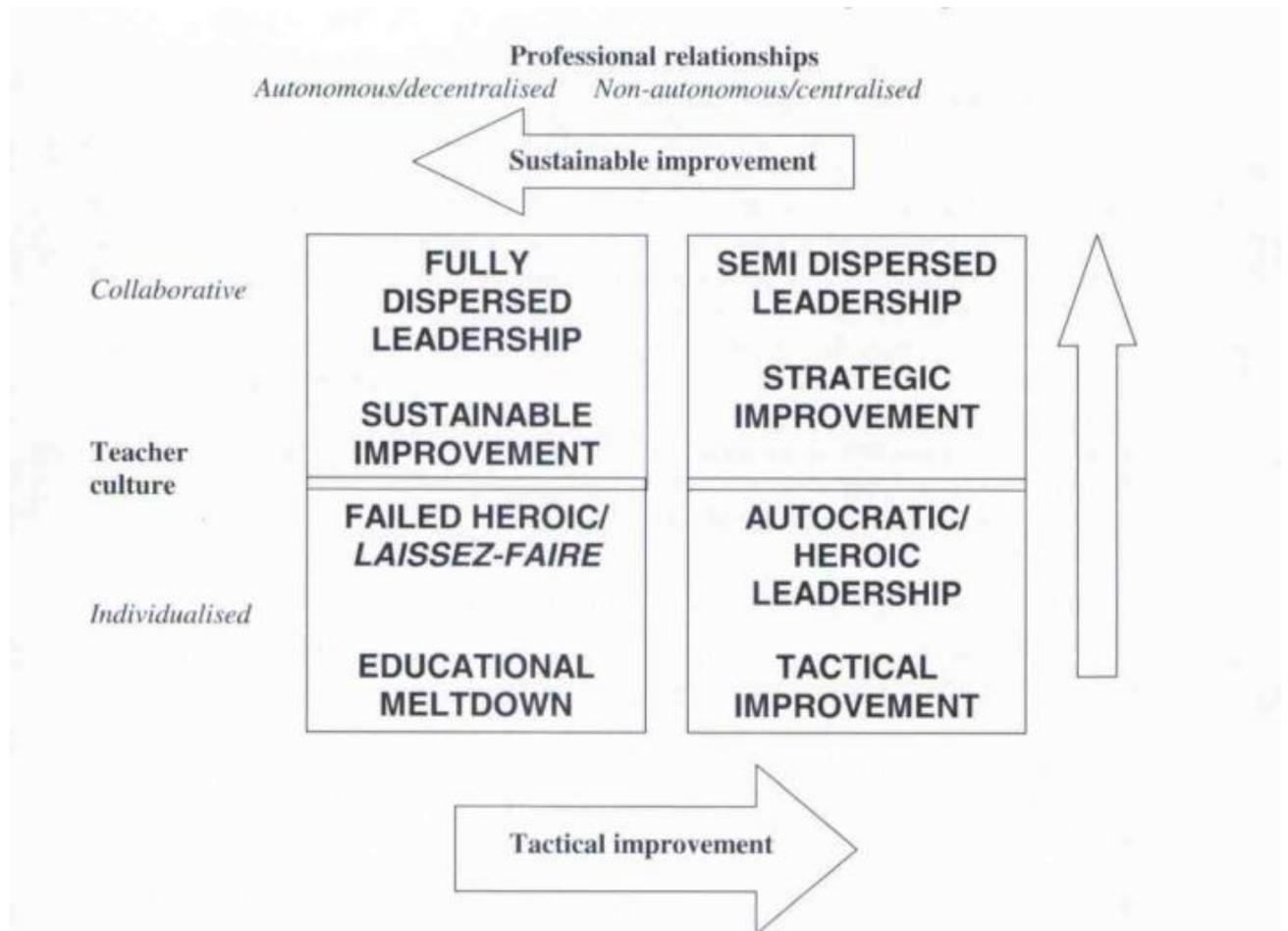
These schools have rising exam results but still -non autonomous relationships, despite the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) delegating many leadership responsibilities to middle managers. 'Continuous Professional Development (CPD) needs are being met' (p.103).

### *Sustainable improvement*

A school at this stage has a collaborative teacher culture, and staff who work with other schools. 'There are few formal monitoring and accountability systems as the staff work from a position of trust and mutual respect. Professional relationships are fully autonomous and the SLT promotes democratic leadership and provide opportunities for all to develop leadership skills' (p.104). CPD is seen as the key to school improvement and individual teachers are data rich, regularly discussing data with colleagues and pupils.

If the two typologies are merged, each leadership approach becomes associated with an improvement typology, and therefore a school development stage. 'If the leader is sensitive to the development stage and adopts an overall approach to match this phase, there is potential to move the school forward' (Chapman, 2004, p104).

*Model of leadership for improvement in Schools Facing Challenging circumstances.*



**Figure 3: A model towards leadership for improvement in SfCC.**

*Implications of the model according to Chapman (2004):*

- This model recognises the importance of school leaders developing a sophisticated understanding of the change process within their school context and development phase.

- A school needs to develop reflective school leaders that are professionally and socially aware, in order to diagnose their leadership approach and the school's development stage.
- To improve a SFCC, the leader must transform their overall approach to leadership in synergy with the school's developmental capacity.
- Leaders must match and evolve their general leadership approach to the school's development stage if short-term improvements are to be converted in to powerful sustainable gains.

### *Conclusions*

Due to the strength of its axes, and the implications of the model being significantly appropriate to the improvement efforts of Trinity Academy, Chapman's model of leadership for improvement in SfCC will be used as a conceptual framework for analysis in this paper. At the same time, the model suggests that different approaches might be needed for different departments and individuals at different times to move them forward; Harris and Chapman (2004) have noted the importance of this differentiated approach to school improvement and that it offers more flexibility and choice. In this way, schools can implement those improvement strategies that best meet the needs of their students and teachers in their context, since 'one size of improvement strategy does not fit all' (Stoll, 1999, p523).

This model of leadership for improvement is therefore limited to providing an overview of the appropriate dominant leadership approach for any one developmental stage (Chapman, 2004).

## **Methodology**

This chapter will first contextualise the study within a research paradigm. The research approach will then be discussed followed by data collection methods and research-related ethics.

### *Research Paradigms*

'In making sense of research information and transforming it into data, researchers draw implicitly or explicitly on a set of beliefs or epistemological assumptions called *paradigms*' (Morrison, 2007, p. 19). The two broadest paradigms used by researchers are positivism: where it is accepted that facts can be collected about the world, and interpretivism: where emphasis is placed on the way human beings give meaning to their lives (Morrison, 2007). In terms of data, a feature of positivist research includes verifiable 'facts' generated by quantitative data, whereas the interpretivist approach is constructed from a subjective perspective, giving more significance to qualitative data (Morrison, 2007).

To contextualise this study within the paradigms and thus deduce how best to conduct the research, the ontology and the epistemology of the study must be examined. Mertens (2005) in Grogan and Simmons (2007) explains that the 'ontological underpinnings...address the question of 'what is the nature of reality?' whereas the epistemological foundation addresses the nature of knowledge' (p.38). Given that this study concerns itself with the experiences of people, and how they perceive reality in different ways (Morrison, 2007), this study falls within the concept of interpretivism. Consequently, this study adopts a relativist ontology, the notion that

reality is based on meanings and experiences, and a subjectivist epistemology, the idea that there is a clear link between the researcher and the research subject, or 'the relationship between the 'knower' and what is to be known' (Grogan & Simmons, 2007, p. 38).

### *Research Approaches*

Within the paradigm of interpretivism, research approaches for projects include case studies and action research, both of which will now be discussed in detail.

Lomax in Briggs and Coleman (2007), adapts the definition of action research given by Carr and Kemmis (1986) to describe the approach as a 'self-reflective, self-critical and critical enquiry undertaken by professionals to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the wider contexts of practice (p.156). Although the aim of this study is to *identify* how effective the practice is at Trinity Academy, it has not *intentionally set out to change* the situation being studied (Lomax, 2007), which is a key principle of action research.

Furthermore, the cycles of action research must be considered and, within the time constraints of this dissertation, there was insufficient time to carry out the seven stages of action research (Lomax, 2007) which is why this research approach was discounted.

In Briggs and Coleman (2007) Bassey alludes to the problem of differing definitions for case studies. Although Yin (2009) provides a simple and concise definition of a case study as 'an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context' (p.18), Bassey (2007) offers a more encompassing definition:

An educational case study is an empirical enquiry which is:

- Conducted within a localised boundary of space and time.
- Into interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system.
- Mainly in its natural context and within an ethic of respect for persons.
- In order to inform the judgements and decisions of practitioners or policymakers.
- or of theoreticians who are working to these ends and,
- such that sufficient data are collected for the researcher to be able:
  - (a) to explore significant features of the case
  - (b) to create plausible interpretations of what is found
  - (c) to test for the trustworthiness of these interpretations
  - (d) to construct a worthwhile argument or story
  - (e) to relate the argument or story to any relevant research in the literature
  - (f) to convey convincingly to an audience this argument or story
  - (g) To provide an audit trail by which other researchers may validate or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments (p.143).

Bell (2005), warns that case studies have many pros and cons when used as a research approach; these arguments will now be looked at further.

Since a case study is the study of 'a particular' (Stake, 1995 in Cohen *et al.*, 2013), Nisbet and Watt (1984) in Cohen *et al.* (2013) theorise that a study can catch unique information which might be the key to understanding the information. However, Yin (2009), argues that one 'case' could be a one-off situation, therefore placing 'all eggs in one basket' (p. 61). Creating data that does not cater for the wider population is one main criticism of case studies, yet Nisbet and Watt believe that one case study *can* create generalisations for the benefit of other researchers. On the other hand, Bassey (1999) argues that generalisation is not always possible; other teachers cannot easily relate to one standalone case study, therefore it's relatability of a case study that is more important than its generalisability.

In terms of data collection and analysis, a case study can be conducted by one researcher without the need of a team (Bell, 2005), and the findings are often widely

accessible for different audiences as they speak for themselves (Nisbet and Watt, 1984 in Cohen *et al.* 2013). Furthermore, case studies are not limited to using one data collection method (Bell, 2005) therefore creating conditions for in-depth and rich results. The insights that case studies provide can contribute to action taken in policy making, or interpreted and used directly by individuals. However, one major disadvantage of case studies is that data cannot be easily cross checked, therefore the researcher runs the risk of their results being subjective or prone to observer bias (Nisbet and Watt, 1984 in Cohen *et al.* 2013).

Despite the merits and pitfalls of using case studies, this was the research approach chosen for this study due to the ease of carrying out the method as an individual, and the scope to study one aspect in depth within the given time constraints. Bassey (1999) reminds us that, ultimately, 'researchers use whatever methods seem to them to be appropriate and practical' (p.69). The measures taken to mitigate the disadvantages of case-studies will now be explored.

Firstly, the focus of this study was chosen with the aim of creating data, hypotheses or insights that other schools could relate to. Given that all special measures schools are required to improve rapidly and substantially, the risk of this case study being a 'one off situation' is minimal. As a result, even if 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey, 1981) are generated, other schools will be able to relate to the study in some way, which Bassey highlights as a priority of this research approach:

If a case study is...aimed at the improvement of education, if they are relatable and if...they extend the barriers of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research (Bassey, 1981, p. 86).

Another factor to consider, as previously discussed, is the problem of being an individual researcher and therefore collecting unreliable data. In order to mitigate the

disadvantages of being an individual researcher, forging professional relationships based on trust was essential to generate a high response rate for the questionnaire. Moreover, being an *inside researcher* (Mercer, 2007), which is a term explained further in the *ethical considerations* section of this chapter, was also likely to skew data.

Finally, when looking ahead to data analysis, it was important to avoid the trap of heavily guiding the findings and recommendations of the study. As much as possible then, direct quotations from interviews and questionnaires were used as evidence for analysis.

### *Data collection*

As previously mentioned, case studies do not limit researchers to one specific method of data collection, therefore all potential methods, which will now be briefly outlined, were considered before choosing the most appropriate.

### *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires are the most widely used procedure for obtaining information since they are economical, they can reach distant respondents, and they can be written for a specific purpose (Opie, 2004). However, Bell (2005) describes the most significant limitation of questionnaires is that they:

Provide answers to the questions what? Where? When? And How? but it is not so easy to find out Why? Causal relationships can rarely if ever be proved by a questionnaire. The main emphasis is on fact-finding (Bell, 2005, p.15).

Bell continues to state that the answer to the 'why' question is much better achieved through direct communication. So despite the practicalities offered by a

questionnaire, it is argued that they are inadequate to understand certain forms of information, for example emotions and behaviour.

### *Interviews*

As discussed above, questionnaires are good for answering the 'what' question, whereas interviews are the direct communication needed to answer the 'why' behind it. Opie (2004) suggests that not all participants feel comfortable writing answers to open ended questions on paper, which is where interviews come in. It is the interviewer who can seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given, and can then record qualitative information about the topic. This enables the interviewer to have 'more latitude to probe beyond the answers and thus enter into a dialogue with the interviewee' (May, 2001, p.135). Nevertheless, the drawbacks to using interviews cannot be overlooked. The interpersonal skills and experience of the interviewer must be considered alongside three factors highlighted by Sapsford and Jupp (1996) in Opie (2004): the legitimacy of the interviewer, the perception of the interviewer by the interviewee, and the power relationships between the interviewer and interviewee. All these factors have a bearing on the quality of the interview and its findings.

### *Focus Groups*

Focus groups as a data collection method 'excel at providing insights into process rather than outcome' (Barbour, 2008, p. 30) and Myers and Macnaghten (1999),

cited in Barbour (2008), point out that 'many groups do not reach consensus, but it is the interchange between participants that is the valuable data for the researcher' (p31). However, Blaxter *et al.* (1996) and Smithson (2000) in Barbour (2008) note the disadvantages of a focus group including issues with analysis of data, confidentiality and arguably most importantly the group dynamic. 'All researchers have to face the possibility that the respondents are simply telling them what they think they want to hear, a problem that is exacerbated by the fear of peer group disapproval' (Smithson, 2000 in Barbour, 2008, p.34).

### *Observational Research*

Opie (2004) outlines the advantages of observational research as: 1) They enable the researcher to record observations directly, 2) They can provide information on the environment and behaviour of those that cannot speak for themselves and 3) The data they generate can be used to 'check' on results obtained by other means. On the other hand, Opie considers that 'people may subconsciously change the way they behave, the researcher will inevitably influence the interpretations of behaviour, and finally that observational research can be very time consuming' (p. 122).

Having considered the arguments for and against the potential methods for data collection, the two methods chosen for this study were questionnaires and interviews. Although data provided by questionnaires has its limitations, choosing this method was a pragmatic decision due to time constraints and looking ahead to data analysis. Furthermore, Blaxter *et al.* (1996) agree that 'the addition of some quantitative evidence may help generalisability' (p.206). Choosing a second method sought to generate more reliable data and, given the interpretivist approach to the

case study and its focus on conveying a picture of the reality of people's lives, an interview was also chosen as a research instrument. Gillham (2008) claims that a face-to-face interview is 'without parallel as a method and, more importantly, it can also give meaning to questionnaire responses. In other words, it doesn't just *illustrate*, it also *illuminates*' (p. 100).

The process behind designing and creating the research instruments will now be discussed along with issues of rigour, trustworthiness and reliability.

### *Planning*

The questionnaire sought to generate evidence to answer the research questions. For example, in order to answer research question 2 which concerns the effectiveness of the marking policy, questions were asked about its creation, implementation and monitoring. The wording of the questions was, as Oppenheim in May (2001) alludes, a task of central importance: 'In reality, questioning people is more like trying to catch a particularly elusive fish, by hopefully casting different kinds of bait at different depths, without knowing what goes on beneath the surface!' (p. 112). Other issues concerned question ordering and, having drawn on the surrounding literature, the questionnaire was ordered not in the best logical sequence, but the best social-psychological sequence (May, 2001). Simply put, the questionnaire started with 'easy' closed questions and finished with open ended questions. The final decision in this design process was how to measure the responses. For ease of analysis, the closed questions had four options: Yes, No, Yes and No, Unsure, which were chosen as a result of 3 pilot studies which are

discussed in the *Piloting* section. See appendix 3 for the final version of the questionnaire.

The first stage of planning the interview was deciding which structure to use. As Ribbins (2007) reminds us, 'We interview people to explore their views in ways that cannot be achieved by other forms of research' (p. 208), therefore the interview had to provide answers that the questionnaire could not. A structured interview was thus discounted. As a novice interviewer, an unstructured interview was also discounted by the researcher due to the lack of experience that is required to conduct an effective interview of this nature. Consequently, a semi-structured interview was used which allowed the conversation to be guided by the interviewee and it resulted in the feelings and opinions expressed by the two interviewees becoming as important as the questions being asked (Bush, 2007). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are closely linked to the interpretivist paradigm, and they 'allow for the development of ideas and understanding' (Opie, 2004, p. 116).

The interview questions were based on the research questions, and as it was semi-structured in nature, main questions were planned as well as 'prompts' to encourage further elaboration by the respondent (see appendix 2 for the interview questions).

### *Sampling*

The sample for the questionnaire was purposive (Opie, 2004), meaning that respondents were chosen on the basis of their typicality. This was the sampling method since in order to answer a questionnaire fully, the respondent had to a) be a teaching member of staff that uses the marking policy and b) have experience of the

previous and current marking policy. Questionnaires were given to all 35 staff members who satisfied these criteria. See figure 4 for a table of participants.

Role	Number of respondents
Teacher	16
Key Stage 3/4/5 Co-ordinator	6
Head of Department	6
Other	1 (Head of Subject)

**Figure 4: A table of participants for the questionnaire**

The purpose of the interview was to determine the ‘why’ behind the questions on the questionnaire, therefore one interviewee had to be a member of staff that fitted the criteria of the questionnaire sample. For this reason, a middle leader (Head of Subject) was chosen for interview. Due to their involvement in the implementation of the new marking policy and the underlying leadership theme in this study, the Head Teacher was also chosen to be interviewed. Time constraints of the interview process and transcription meant that one further teacher could not be interviewed, which would have been beneficial to the study.

### *Piloting*

As Oppenheim (1992) suggests, ‘questionnaires do not emerge fully-fledged; they have to be created or adapted, fashioned and developed to maturity – they have to be piloted’ (p.47). This pre-testing phase enables you to ‘assess both individual questions and how the measurement tool functions as a coherent whole in the field’ (May, 2001, p. 107). The final questionnaire for this study followed 3 pilot studies,

which all helped to refine questions, choose an appropriate measurement tool, and record time taken for completion. The pilot studies highlighted the downfalls of the initial measurement tool which was a scaled response. Gillham (2008) identifies them as:

- People often don't use the whole scale (they opt for neutral)
- People tend to lean towards the positive option
- Whatever response they tick, you don't know *why* (p. 32).

This meant that the next pilot used categories for measuring answers: Yes and No.

This also proved problematic as the categories were not 'exclusive or exhaustive'

(Gillham, 2008, p.114). Once the measurement tool had been refined, pilot

respondents were eager to add more information to certain closed questions, for

example 'Has the new marking policy impacted on the quality of your feedback?'

Consequently, questions 12, 13 and 14 all have a follow up question such as 'in what way?' to elicit a more detailed response.

Despite recommendations from literature to pilot the interview, (Opie, 2004; Bell, 2005), issues of time and respondent confidentiality meant this was not possible for this project. As most interview questions linked to those of the questionnaire, any insensitive or irrelevant questions had already been eliminated from the study.

#### *Issues of rigour, validity and reliability.*

As with most case studies, this research contains many variables and the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data will now be discussed.

With the aim of collecting credible, reliable data for this project, respondent triangulation was used; the evidence was collected from three perspectives: the Head Teacher, middle leaders, and teachers. Consequently, experiences could be

verified against others in order to develop a 'rich picture' of Trinity Academy's improvement (Shenton, 2004, p.66).

To ensure the reliability and rigour of the data, overlap methods (Guba, 1981) were used with the intention that 'weaknesses in one method could be compensated for by strengths in another' (Denscombe, 1998, p. 154). For example, the interviews undertaken aimed, in part, to further evidence the quantitative data collected by the questionnaires.

In terms of reliability, the two interviews were conducted separately in order to receive candid, and therefore more reliable, responses thus providing evidence that can be cross-checked. It was important to ensure that the findings collected via interview were 'the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher' (Shenton, 2004, p.72). Cohen and Manion (1994) in Mercer (2007) remind us that the sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the respondent, and the content of questions. Although it was difficult to combat the bias of characteristics of individuals involved, steps were taken to ensure that the questions asked were open and in no way leading. Finally, to ensure validity, the interviews were recorded to avoid misrepresenting the views of interviewees, 'by claiming they have said something when they did not' (Ribbins, 2007, p. 208).

### *Data collection*

The questionnaires were self-administered, with a view to achieving a high response rate (Opie, 2004). An e-mail was sent simultaneously to offer guidance for the anonymous return of the questionnaire and to give incentive for its completion. The value of the study was explained to respondents to ensure their investment in the

project, resulting in them providing valid and honest responses. In total, 29 questionnaires out of 35 were returned, which suggests a good representation of the respondent population.

The interviews were carried out at a time suitable for respondents and in a neutral setting, in order to minimise any bias of the respondent or researcher. Consent was given by both interviewees to record the interviews and for anonymous quotes to be used. Both interviews were recorded and transcribed fully in order to preserve the natural language of interviewer and interviewee (Opie, 2004).

### *Analysis*

A systematic approach to data analysis was taken, 'in order to minimise the risk of inaccurate interpretation' (Cohen *et al.*, 2013, p.554). Data was analysed using Chapman's Model for Leadership in SfCC, in order to gather evidence to answer the research questions.

The analysis of the closed questions on the questionnaire generated 'descriptive statistics' and it provided 'frequency counts' (Opie, 2004). For example, '23 out of 29 respondents have adapted the marking policy within their department.' As per the example, statistics have been used to present quantitative data in manageable form, therefore simplifying large amounts of data. The summaries of the statistics, in the *findings* section of this paper, have therefore be used as evidence to answer the research questions.

With regard to the open ended questions on the questionnaire and the responses given in the interview, the data was coded according to the two axes of Chapman's model for SfCC (2004): Teacher culture and professional relationships. The coding of open ended replies permitted their comparison (May, 2001) and helped to

generate hypotheses about categories and their relations. Gershon and Horowitz in May (2001) advocate coding because 'only by comparing a series of interviews can the significance of any one of them be fully understood. And, in the long run, each interview will add to the final story' (p. 136). Quotes from the interviews and questionnaires were used as qualitative evidence to answer the research questions.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical issues were considered at all points of this dissertation, and before collecting any data, ethical approval was granted from the University of Warwick (appendix 4). The BERA Ethical Guidelines (2011) have been considered against every aspect of this project to ensure all ethical responsibilities have been fulfilled.

Consent of participants was sought in one of two ways. The staff chosen to complete the questionnaire were notified, by the questionnaire and a follow up e-mail, that completion of the questions was voluntary and in doing so, they give consent to the researcher to use their answers as evidence. The staff being interviewed were provided with a participant information sheet beforehand (appendix 5) to ensure they understood the research process (BERA, 2011), and they agreed to participate by completing a participant consent form (appendix 6).

Participants were informed that they could withdraw at any point of the project, without giving a reason, and the chance of detriment arising from participation (BERA, 2011) is minimal due to the steps taken towards confidentiality. The measures taken to ensure participants' privacy included the secure storage of their data, the reassurance of how their data will be used, and anonymity. The school was given the pseudonym 'Trinity Academy', and participants referred to in the study were labelled as 'Teacher 1', for example.

The final ethical consideration is the issue of being an 'insider-researcher' (Mercer, 2007), and what measures were taken to mitigate the researcher's influence on respondents. As outlined by Shah (2004) in Mercer (2007), people may not share certain information with an insider for fear of being judged, and there is also a risk that the 'insider researcher' will gain access to sensitive or privileged information (Unluer, 2012). Consequently, the questions asked in the questionnaire and interview were scrutinised by the researcher and pilot studies to eliminate intrusive and insensitive questions. Furthermore, both interviewees were reminded that responding to all questions was not compulsory if they deemed any inappropriate. Although Simnel (1950) in Mercer (2007) asserts that only the neutral outsider can achieve an objective account of human interaction, being an 'insider-researcher' in this project was beneficial due to the mutual understanding of the local values, taboos, knowledge and formal and informal power structures (Unluer, 2012).

#### *Reflections on research methodology*

For the purpose of this project, a case-study functioned well as the research approach as it allowed for multiple data collection tools to be used. The interviews provided extensive qualitative data, however, a pilot study would have been beneficial to refine the questions and also to enhance the researcher's interview technique. For example, discussing Chapman's Model of Leadership (2004) prior to the interviews could have led to subconsciously biased responses. Despite a high response rate, the questionnaires required further modification in order to maximise their credibility and justify their contribution to the project. In the future, observational research or the use of documentation would be more appropriate research instruments for a case-study of an interpretivist nature. Finally, had the word count and time constraints allowed, collecting data from a group of students and

interviewing a classroom teacher would have provided more triangulation and therefore more rigorous data to support the study.

The next two chapters include the findings and analysis of the data collected.

## **Findings**

This chapter records the data collected by the questionnaire, and these summaries will be used, along with relevant quotes from the two interviews, to generate findings that will be used for later analysis when answering the research questions.

As suggested by Bell (2005), the data from the questionnaires was collated in summary tables for each question rather than bar charts, to allow the coding of responses to open ended questions. The number of responses for each category of each question will now be summarised, and any qualitative data has been 'clustered' according to its meaning (Miles and Huberman, 1994, in Bell, 2005) and its frequency has been recorded. Although 29 respondents completed the questionnaire, some questions were omitted by respondents and on occasion two responses were given for open ended questions, thus generating a variable total number of responses.

Summary tables for the questionnaire

<b>Q1: In your opinion, is the whole staff body fully invested in the improvement of the school?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
15	5	7	2

<b>Q2: Do you feel part of a school wide team?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
9	10	10	0

<b>Q3: Does your department work closely with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT)?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
13	6	8	2

<b>Q4: Do you work collaboratively with your department in order to improve your teaching and learning practice?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
26	0	3	0

<b>Q5: In your opinion, do Heads of Departments have the autonomy to make decisions about their department?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure

11	2	15	1
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**Q6: In your opinion, before the special measures judgement, did marking and feedback help students to make at least good progress across the school?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
6	5	13	4

**Q7: Before the special measures judgement, did teachers mark in the same way across the school?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
0	20	5	4

**Q8: Do you know how to use the new marking policy to ensure that students make at least good progress?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
22	0	7	0

**Q9: Do you feel like you would benefit from further CPD (Continuous Professional Development) to improve the quality of your marking and feedback?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
20	8	1	0

**Q10: Do you use the new marking policy consistently (every time you mark)?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
21	4	4	0

**Q11: Has your department adapted the new marking and feedback policy in any way?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
23	3	2	1

**Q12a: Has the new marking policy impacted on the quality of your feedback?**

Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
17	2	7	3

**Q12b: In what way?**

Key meaning	Frequency
It allows for more detailed and specific feedback to be given	8
It encourages a clear, active student response	5
Department marking and impact was similar before	5
Students know how to improve their work	3
It clearly evidences student progress	2
It encourages regular and consistent marking	2
There is little impact – verbal feedback is more powerful	1
The quality of written work has improved	1

<b>Q13a: When students respond to your marking, does it have an impact?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
11	0	18	0

<b>Q13b: In what way?</b>	
Key meaning	Frequency
It is only useful when students engage and respond correctly	7
It improves the work due to reflection and correction	6
Students can show a deeper understanding of their work	3
Students are offered clear next steps	2
Some students only benefit from verbal feedback	2
The targets and feedback are forgotten	2
It depends on what type of work is being marked	2
Students' responses do not indicate whether the feedback was useful	1
Impact evidenced through data improvements	1

<b>Q14a: Does the Senior Leadership Team monitor the use of the marking policy?</b>			
Yes	No	Yes and No	Unsure
19	1	9	0

<b>Q14b: What impact does this monitoring have on your practice?</b>	
Key meaning	Frequency

It reassures me I am using the policy effectively and consistently	9
None – no feedback has been given to me	7
More feedback is needed from SLT after book scrutinies	4
It increases stress levels and allows less time for lesson planning	3
I've never had work asked for	2
There is no consistent approach to the monitoring and feedback process	2
Feedback is given through SLT if requested	3
It had made me spend more time on books of certain groups of students	1
Unmarked work will be used against me	1

**Q15: Who is in charge of making decisions at school?**

Key meaning	Frequency
The Head Teacher	10
The Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	6
Heads of Departments (HoDs) and the Head Teacher	3
The Head Teacher and SLT	2
One specific member of SLT (Not the Head Teacher)	2
The Head Teacher, HoDs, and SLT	1
It depends on what area of school	1
Unsure	1

**Q16: Who devised the new marking and feedback policy?**

Key meaning	Frequency
The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and staff	12

SLT	7
A member of staff	3
SLT and other schools	2
The Head Teacher and SLT	1
Ofsted	1
A staff team	1
Unsure	1

<b>Q17: Who introduced the new marking policy to you?</b>	
Key meaning	Frequency
SLT (Including Head Teacher)	11
HoDs and SLT	5
A member of staff	3
Unsure	4
A member of staff	3
SLT and members of staff	3
HoD 2	2

<b>Q18: What impact do you <i>think</i> the new marking and feedback policy will have on student outcomes at GCSE?</b>	
Key meaning	Frequency
Students will be more aware of how to succeed	6
Depends on staff consistency	4
Depends on students' engagement with the process	4

A positive impact	4
Minimal – verbal feedback is more powerful and less time consuming	3
No difference to before the policy was introduced	2
Unsure 2	2
Minimal – can't be applied to coursework	1

The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents to add any further information they felt was relevant. Due to the qualitative nature of the answers provided, direct quotes have been extracted and used as evidence for the findings below. To aid later analysis, the data will now be considered in relation to the axes of Chapman's model of leadership for SfCC and both marking and feedback policies.

### **Findings on Teacher Culture**

The axis of *Teacher Culture* was included by Chapman (2004) in the model for leadership in SfCC since schools with high social capital, meaning widespread collaboration and a focus on staff development, emerged as a characteristic of improving schools. The data collected suggests that at Trinity Academy, the level of social capital experienced by staff is closely linked to the level of responsibility they have at school.

**Finding 1: There are elements of successful collaboration at Trinity Academy, within departments for example, but the staff do not feel part of a wider collaborative culture.**

### ***Evidence suggesting there is a collaborative teacher culture***

“The loyalty and the dedication of the staff to get us out of our challenging circumstances are quite substantive.” (Head Teacher – HT)

“I certainly don’t feel outside of a team, no, I feel very much that I try to engender a sense of ‘we’re all in a team together’ to deal with the situation that we’re in.” (HT)

“I would say relationships between staff are quite strong, because they feel like they’re in it together.” (ML1)

13 out of 29 questionnaire respondents felt their department works closely with the Senior Leadership Team. (Q3)

26 out of 29 staff felt they work collaboratively within their department. (Q4)

### ***Evidence suggesting there is an individualised teacher culture***

“I don’t believe that down the strata there is the same strength of relationships, I think within the subgroups they have strong relationships.” (ML1)

9 out of the 29 questionnaire respondents felt that they are part of a school wide team. (Q2)

15 respondents believed that the staff body is fully invested in the improvement of the school. (Q1)

## **Findings on Professional Relationships**

Jackson (2000) claims that fostering autonomous relationships of staff should be a focus of actively improving schools, however, as Fitzgerald and Gunter (2008) consider, schools remain hierarchical despite the use of terms which might suggest a more distributed approach. This claim is supported by the data collected at Trinity Academy.

**Finding 2: The Head Teacher perceives professional relationships to be autonomous, however the staff body disagrees.**

***Evidence showing the presence of autonomous professional relationships***

“It’s the responsibility of the middle leader to engender that collaborative planning and drive.” (HT)

“On a micro-management level, I make the decisions.” (ML1)

12 out of 29 questionnaire respondents believed that the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the staff body were both involved in devising the new marking policy. (Q16)

11 out of 29 respondents felt that their Head of Department had autonomy to make decisions, 15 opted for ‘yes and no.’ (Q5)

***Evidence showing the presence of non-autonomous professional relationships***

“The strategic intent of the leadership which is filtered down to and dispersed through the staff helps to keep everybody pushing in the same direction.” (HT)

“Between middle leaders and senior leaders ... there’s a lot of tension there because the responsibility always seems to land on the shoulders of the middle leaders..., they take a bullet a lot.” (ML1)

“For me, the decisions are made by the Head. The Head, SLT 2, SLT 3, etc. but I’d say a very select amount of people. Some of the ideas they [the staff] have had have been brilliant, but not been put in to place because they just don’t suit their [SLT] mind set, and their mind set is the most important mind-set in this school by a mile.” (ML1)

16 out of 29 questionnaire respondents believed that decisions are made by the Head (10) and the SLT (6). (Q15)

11 respondents believed that solely the Head Teacher and SLT introduced the new marking policy.(Q17)

**Findings on the previous marking policy and creation of the new**

In order to analyse ‘what works and why’ (Creemers & Reezigt, 2005) in a school, we must also reflect on what does not work and why. Arguably, it is the

enhancement of the quality of teaching that needs to be the central theme of any improvement strategy (Hopkins, 2013) and this is an area, as highlighted by the data collected, which required improvement at Trinity Academy. The creation of the new marking and feedback policy suggests some level of collaboration between the SLT and teaching staff.

**Finding 3: The previous marking and feedback policy was inadequate because**

***Evidence highlighting the ineffectiveness of the previous policy***

“I think it was deemed inadequate because it didn’t focus enough on ensuring students made progress... too much feedback was tick and flick and generic in nature ...I just don’t think there was consistency across the school.” (HT)

“There wasn’t one [a marking policy]. None. We were outstanding, outstanding schools don’t have marking policies.” (ML1)

“Everyone had a different idea about what marking was. It was different, some people did, some people didn’t, very few people marked.” (ML1)

20 out of 29 respondents agreed that staff did not mark consistently across the school before the Special Measures judgement. (Q7)

**there was a lack of consistency.**

**Finding 4: The new marking and feedback policy was devised through SLT and teacher collaboration.**

***Evidence to support teacher and SLT collaboration***

“That [the marking policy] was devised through a staff working group... so that everybody was on the same page and we could make sure that people consistently thought that it was a good idea.” (HT)

12 out of 29 questionnaire respondents felt the new marking policy was created by a staff group *alongside* the SLT. (Q16)

“It would be nice to have a group of staff to meet with the Head again like at the start of the year.” (Teacher 1 – additional comment)

## **Findings on the newly implemented marking policy and its monitoring**

Referring to School Effectiveness Literature, a school must prioritise student learning and outcomes as well as the quality of teaching (Day *et al.*, 2010; Harris & Chapman, 2004). The data collected highlights that there are strengths and weaknesses of the new marking policy at Trinity Academy, and of its monitoring process.

**Finding 5: The new marking policy is adaptable, and is used consistently and confidently by staff.**

### ***Evidence to support the integration of the marking and feedback policy***

“But I do think that leaders have interpreted that [the marking policy] to suit their department, and I think that is a critical thing that needed to be done.” (HT)

“I think that in a school where you have the number of staff and students we have, I think bringing consistently and coherence across departments ...can only be a positive thing.” (HT)

23 out of 29 questionnaire respondents have adapted the marking policy within their department.(Q11)

21 respondents claim to use the policy every time they mark books.(Q10)

22 respondents are confident that they know how to use the policy to ensure students make at least good progress. (Q8)

**Finding 6: The extent to which the new marking and feedback policy positively affects stakeholders at school varies considerably.**

### ***Evidence to suggest the marking and feedback policy has a positive effect***

### ***on stakeholders***

“But what you should see, is marking for impact, and marking for progress, and I think that our marking and feedback policy is set up to deliver that and it’s set up to make it very child centred.” (HT)

6 questionnaire respondents claimed the policy would help students identify how to succeed in exams. (Q18)

### ***Evidence to suggest the marking and feedback policy has little or negative effect on stakeholders***

“I don’t feel people buy in to the marking policy, I think it’s overdone, it’s overcooked. It’s not efficient, it’s overbearing.” (ML1)

“I think the marking’s had a big impact on the friendliness of the staff this year.”(ML1)

“It’s a non-thinking process these yellow boxes. Doesn’t work. It’s a non-thinking marking policy.” (ML1)

“Some kids like it some kids don’t. Has progress improved? No I don’t think so, not much...The system is not fit for purpose.” (ML1)

18 out of 29 respondents answered ‘yes and no’ with regard to whether the policy had an impact on students. The most frequent ‘why’ response suggested that the impact of the policy was dependent on the student’s response, since many did not engage fully and respond correctly. (Q13a, 13b)

8 staff believed that the success of the policy in the long term is dependent on staff consistency and student engagement.(Q18)

“The new policy takes more time to implement and I am not sure that it has improved the impact and outcomes.” (Head of Subject)

“The process is very time consuming and there is not enough time allocated.” (Teacher 2)

“[I have] concerns that students are getting sick of too many yellow boxes!” (Head of Department)

**Finding 7: The monitoring of the marking and feedback policy has a variable influence over staff members.**

***Evidence to suggest the monitoring of the marking and feedback policy has a positive influence***

“Whatever it is that impacts upon a child in the classroom, then senior leadership would take the responsibility of monitoring that and evidencing the progress very seriously.”(HT)

“I think ...being very specific through book scrutinies ...is also very effective practice.” (HT)

19 out of 29 staff agreed the policy was monitored by the SLT, and a further 9 opted for ‘yes and no’. (Q14a)

9 staff felt that the monitoring reassures them that they are using the policy effectively and consistently. (14b)

***Evidence to suggest the monitoring of the marking and feedback policy has little or negative influence***

“Book scrutinies are a pathetic way to do it [monitor teachers’ marking].” (ML1)

“What’s a book scrutiny? ‘We are getting X, Y and Z’s books in a weeks’ time’ ‘better get them marked then’. Dah dah!” (ML1)

7 questionnaire respondents claimed that the monitoring of the books had no impact on their practice, as no feedback has been given to them. (14b)

4 staff agreed that more feedback is needed from SLT following a book scrutiny. (Q14b)

“Marking is not monitored closely enough. It is still not consistent across departments.” (KS3/4/5 Co-ordinator)

“[Book scrutinies] stress me out and I have less time to plan lessons.”(Teacher 3)

**Additional findings**

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews and the open ended questions on the questionnaire, some findings emerged that did not relate to the axes of the leadership model, or the research questions. These findings are listed and evidenced below:

**Finding 8: The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) at Trinity**

***Evidence to support finding 8***

“I think that overall things like CPD have been lost and because you lose CPD, I think people think ‘well I’m getting worse as a teacher’ so they just do the bare minimum.” (ML1)

“We don’t do anywhere near enough CPD; it’s a forgotten art in this school.” (ML1)

20 out of 29 respondents felt they would benefit from further CPD to enhance the quality of their marking and feedback. (Q9)

**Academy is not sufficient for that of an improving school.**

**Finding 9: The high levels of external accountability, which manifest themselves as internal accountability measures, are having a negative impact on the staff at Trinity Academy.**

***Evidence to support finding 9***

“Well we set the strategic direction of the school through the action plan, I mean, that’s categorical, they are set through that.” (HT)

“We’ve increased the amount of work scrutinies that we do.”(HT)

“[Decisions are influenced by] getting out of special measures. I mean that is a clear factor for us....everything that we do is driven by the need to get out of that situation as fast as possible.” (HT)

“An inspection of a school in our situation is data driven.” (HT)

“People haven’t got that much pride in their lessons in my subjects because they are knackered.” (ML1)

“[The monitoring process is] purely because of Ofsted coming in. The ethos of the school has changed, it’s more data driven and [there is] more accountability... more review data.” (ML1)

“Teachers are more stressed out so are the kids. We forget that school’s about enjoying learning, and that’s a big thing that’s been lost in the marking policy. It’s not an enjoyable marking policy. It’s a ‘you do it like this or else’.” (ML1)

“Kids walk around this school with a number above their heads, and they are simply a data set because of Ofsted.” (ML1)

“There is too much accountability measures in this school and a lack of trust. It’s a vicious circle.” (ML1)

“I feel that unmarked work will be used against me.” (Teacher 4)

“As a school we need to be careful with the workload as over marking can have a negative effect and in the long term be unsustainable.” (Teacher 5)

### ***Summary of findings***

<b>Finding 1</b>	There are elements of successful collaboration at Trinity Academy, within departments for example, but the staff do not feel part of a wider collaborative culture.
<b>Finding 2</b>	The Head Teacher perceives professional relationships to be autonomous, however the staff body disagrees.

<b>Finding 3</b>	The previous marking and feedback policy was inadequate because there was a lack of consistency.
<b>Finding 4</b>	The new marking and feedback policy was devised through SLT and teacher collaboration.
<b>Finding 5</b>	The new marking policy is adaptable, and is used consistently and confidently by staff.
<b>Finding 6</b>	The extent to which the new marking and feedback policy positively affects stakeholders at school varies considerably.
<b>Finding 7</b>	The monitoring of the marking and feedback policy has a variable influence over staff members.
<b>Finding 8</b>	The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) at Trinity Academy is not sufficient for that of an improving school.
<b>Finding 9</b>	The high levels of external accountability, which manifest themselves as internal accountability measures, are having a negative impact on the staff at Trinity Academy.

## Analysis

In this chapter, the findings will be used along with relevant literature to answer this paper's research questions:

- 1) Why was the previous marking and feedback policy deemed inadequate and how was the new policy implemented?
- 2) How effective is the new marking and feedback policy and its monitoring process?

- 3) What does the implementation of the marking policy suggest about the leadership at Trinity Academy, based on Chapman’s model of Leadership for Schools facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC)?
- 4) How can Trinity Academy use the marking policy to move towards sustainable school improvement according to Chapman’s model of Leadership for SfCC?

To answer questions 1 and 2, references will be made to School Effectiveness (SE) literature, whereas School Improvement (SI) literature will be used to support the analysis of question 3. The analysis of question 4 will form part of the *Conclusions and Recommendations* section of this paper.

Since all research questions will be referring to Chapman’s model of Leadership for SfCC (2004), it is first necessary to summarise the characteristics of schools that fall into each category of the model. Figure 5 has been constructed using quotes from Chapman (2004, pp.102-105).

<b>Type of Leadership</b>	<b>Nature of improvement strategies</b>	<b>Characteristics demonstrated</b>
Failed heroic / Laissez-faire	Educational meltdown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The school has been deemed ‘Special Measures’.”</li> <li>- “Teachers survive through individual strength.”</li> <li>- “The knowledge and skills base of staff is insufficient.”</li> <li>- “There are few professional development opportunities.”</li> </ul>
Autocratic / Heroic	Tactical Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The school has been deemed ‘Special Measures’.”</li> <li>- “There are high accountability measures.”</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “The relationships are non- autonomous and staff have an individualised culture, with a low knowledge and skill base.”</li> <li>- “High levels of monitoring, implemented by autocratic leadership, pervade all areas of school life in an attempt to minimise variations in practices.”</li> </ul>
Semi-dispersed	Strategic improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “These schools have rising exam results but still -non autonomous relationships.”</li> <li>- “Continuous Professional Development (CPD) needs are being met.”</li> </ul>
Full dispersed	Sustainable improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “A school at this stage has a collaborative teacher culture.”</li> <li>- “There are few formal monitoring and accountability systems as the staff work from a position of trust and mutual respect.”</li> <li>- “The SLT promotes democratic leadership and provide opportunities for all to develop leadership skills.”</li> <li>- “CPD is seen as the key to school improvement.”</li> </ul>

**Figure 5: A summary of characteristics displayed in Chapman’s Model for Leadership in SFCC.**

**Research question 1: Why was the previous marking and feedback policy deemed inadequate and how was the new policy created?**

Ofsted (2015a) judged that, at the time of the initial inspection of Trinity Academy,

The work in students’ books show that the quality of marking is too variable....the school must take action to improve the quality of teaching so that it is at least consistently good and supports all students to make good or better progress, by establishing greater consistency in the marking of students’ work (p. 7).

This judgement formed the rationale for the school to devise a new marking and feedback policy. In order to answer research question 1, SE literature will be drawn

upon and analysed in relation to findings 3 and 4, and a conclusion will be made using Chapman’s model of Leadership for SfCC.

<b>Finding 3</b>	The previous marking and feedback policy was inadequate because there was a lack of consistency.
<b>Finding 4</b>	The new marking and feedback policy was devised through SLT and teacher collaboration.

*Analysis of the previous marking and feedback policy and creation of the new*

The data collected about the previous marking and feedback policy highlights the lack of consistency, for example Middle Leader 1 (ML) claims that “Everyone had a different idea about what marking was. It was different, some people did, some people didn’t, very few people marked”, and the Head Teacher (HT) stated, “I just don’t think there was consistency across the school.” Furthermore, 20 out of 29 respondents agreed that before the Special Measures judgement, staff did not mark in the same way. Given the three staff perspectives agree on the lack of consistency, it is arguable that finding 3 answers the research question itself, however SE literature suggests that effective marking and feedback relies on more than just consistency. Feedback should be timely, (Bangert-Drowns *et al*, 1991; Airasian, 1994; Marzano, 2003), clear (Brookhart, 2008) and specific (Bangert-Drowns *et al.*, 1991; Black & Wiliam, 1998b; Marzano, 2003). Further analysis of the previous policy is problematic, since “there wasn’t one” (ML1), and feedback was “tick and flick and generic in nature” (HT). On the other hand, SE literature points to the importance of teacher pedagogic knowledge and expertise when implementing effective formative feedback (Bennett, 2011; Black & Wiliam, 1998b). Therefore,

thorough analysis of finding 3 suggests that the staff body at Trinity Academy, albeit before the Special Measures judgement, had a low knowledge and skill base. If we refer to figure 5, this would place Trinity Academy as a school in either 'Educational Meltdown' or as one pursuing 'tactical improvement'.

Finding 4 was generated as a result of the questionnaire data, which saw 12 respondents agree through an open-ended question, that it was the SLT *and* the teaching staff that devised the new marking and feedback policy. Furthermore, the HT added that the policy "was devised through a staff working group, where we had some examples from other schools that were deemed to be outstanding and we ... went in to staff focus groups who discussed what was needed...and then eventually we developed it and put it in place." Wiles (2008) holds classroom teachers as 'the key to all curriculum work and [they] must be fully and openly involved in the development of school programs' (p.10), and in doing so a more collaborative teacher culture is created. In terms of the policy's integration, the interviews and questionnaires failed to gather evidence to generate a hypothesis. However 11 questionnaire respondents felt that it was the SLT and HT that introduced the new marking policy to them, rather than colleagues in their department. This suggests that although the new policy was devised through collaboration, the hierarchical structure of the school was prevalent when it was implemented.

#### *Conclusion to research question 1*

The previous marking policy at Trinity Academy was deemed inadequate not only due to the lack of consistency in how regularly it was used, but also the lack of expertise demonstrated by staff when it was used. The new policy was created by classroom teachers and the SLT, however it was arguably implemented through a

hierarchical structure. In relation to Chapman’s Model, the low skill set of the staff along with the small pocket of collaboration, would deem Trinity Academy as a school that has autocratic leadership and one that is moving towards tactical improvement.

**Research question 2: How effective is the new marking and feedback policy and its monitoring process?**

There are two elements to be considered in order to answer this research question, which will be analysed separately using SE literature and relevant findings. A conclusion will be drawn in relation to Chapman’s model based on the separate analyses.

*Analysis of the new marking and feedback policy*

The appropriate findings to support analysis of the policy are numbers 5 and 6:

<b>Finding 5</b>	The new marking policy is adaptable, and is used consistently and confidently by staff.
<b>Finding 6</b>	The extent to which the new marking and feedback policy positively affects stakeholders at school varies considerably.

Finding 5 is supported principally by data collected from the questionnaire; 23 out of 29 respondents have adapted the policy within their department, 21 staff members use the policy every time they mark, and 22 feel they can use the policy to good effect. The school has had to make ‘quick gains’ in a short time frame (Chapman, 2004) to get out of Special Measures, and Black and Wiliam (1998b) suggest that

‘where changes have been introduced ... the pace of change is slow because it is very difficult for teachers to change practices which are closely embedded within their whole pattern of pedagogy’ (p.19). However, finding 5 demonstrates that the staff at Trinity Academy have adapted well to this new marking and feedback policy. The departmental adaptations of the policy also suggest that teachers have had sufficient time and support to develop their ideas, which is a key factor in implementing an effective policy (Bennett, 2011).

Finding 6 references ‘stakeholders’, which in this instance will be the staff and students at Trinity Academy. Although the marking policy is being used as per finding 5, the data collected illustrates that it does not have a widespread positive effect on the staff body or the students. Two overriding themes that emerged from the data include staff struggling with the workload, and the success of the policy being dependent on student input. A questionnaire response claimed that “The process [of marking] is very time consuming and there is not enough time allocated” (Teacher 1), and another felt that “Unmarked work will be used against me” (Teacher 2). Gershon (2015) recognises that extra demands made on teacher’s time by formative marking may cause them to eschew it on occasion, or to feel overwhelmed and Ball *et al.* (2012) agree, noting that ‘even more experienced teachers sometimes feel oppressed by policy’ (p. 64). Black and Wiliam (1998b) warn that as a result of onerous marking policies teachers’ feedback to students often seem to serve social and managerial functions, often at the expense of the learning functions. The evidence from the questionnaire supports this idea, as 7 staff believe their feedback to be effective only when students respond correctly, and ML1 claimed that “It’s a non-thinking process these yellow boxes.... The system is not fit for purpose.” On

the other hand, 13 questionnaire respondents believed that the policy allows for specific, targeted feedback and a student response. Therefore, the evidence suggests that the marking policy can be effective, depending on the workload of the teacher, and the quality of student response, as Higgins (2000) reminds us: ‘the very success of teacher feedback lies in the action it provokes from students’ (p.40).

*Analysis of the monitoring process*

Finding 7 supports the analysis of the monitoring process:

<b>Finding 7</b>	The monitoring of the marking and feedback policy has a variable influence over staff members.
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All members of staff agreed, through their responses in interviews and questionnaires, that the marking policy is monitored is through book scrutinies; simply put, the marking of teachers is checked by members of the leadership team. The HT believes that “being very specific through book scrutinies ...is very effective practice”, however the staff body harbours contrasting points of view. 9 out of 29 staff felt that the book scrutinies reassure them that they are using the policy effectively and consistently, whereas 7 staff claimed that the monitoring of the books has no influence over their practice as they receive no feedback, and a further 4 staff agreed that more feedback is needed from SLT following a book scrutiny. Furthermore, the following qualitative responses offer an insight in to the statistics: “Book scrutinies are a pathetic way to do it [monitor teachers’ marking]... what’s a book scrutiny? ‘We are getting X, Y and Z’s books in a weeks’ time’ ‘better get them marked then” (ML1); “[Book scrutinies] stress me out and I have less time to plan lessons”(Teacher 3). This evidence points to the fact that not all staff believe the

monitoring process is effective, however a small proportion feel that it is beneficial for their practice.

### *Conclusion to research question 2*

Finding 5 suggests that the marking and feedback policy is used consistently and adapted effectively, which highlights foundations of collaboration within the staff body. On the other hand, finding 6 brings to our attention that, for some staff, the marking policy is ineffective due to its time consuming nature and its success being determined by student response. From the evidence provided by finding 7, the monitoring of the marking and feedback process is ineffective for more staff than effective. It is clear that Trinity Academy is showing high levels of monitoring, which pervade areas of school life in an attempt to minimise variations in practices. This is a characteristic, if we refer to figure 5, of a school that has autocratic leadership.

### **Research question 3: What does the implementation of the marking policy suggest about the leadership at Trinity Academy, based on Chapman's model of Leadership for Schools facing Challenging Circumstances (SfCC)?**

In order to answer this question it is necessary to analyse the findings in relation to the axes of Chapman's model, Teacher Culture and Professional Relationships, with regards to Trinity Academy and its marking policy. To help reach a conclusion, evidence generated by other research questions will be considered.

### *Analysis of the 'Teacher Culture' at Trinity Academy*

When considering the teacher culture at Trinity Academy, the relevant findings from the previous chapter are findings 1, 7 and 8:

<b>Finding 1</b>	There are elements of successful collaboration at Trinity Academy, within departments for example, but the staff do not feel part of a wider collaborative culture.
<b>Finding 8</b>	The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) at Trinity Academy is not sufficient for that of an improving school.
<b>Finding 9</b>	The high levels of external accountability, which manifest themselves as internal accountability measures, are having a negative impact on the staff at Trinity Academy.

Evidence for the ‘elements of successful collaboration’ mentioned in finding 1 suggests that this is found within departments, rather than between the leadership team and middle leaders or classroom teachers. Classroom teachers feel “in it together” (ML1), however only 9 out of the 29 respondents felt part of a school-wide team, and only 15 claim that the staff body are fully invested in the improvement of the school. So although Trinity Academy shows foundations of a collaborative culture, which is regarded as a dominant theme in SI literature (Hopkins, 1995; Day *et al.* 2010; Chapman & Allen, 2006; Hargreaves, 2001), finding 1 also highlights that there is evidence of a ‘fragmented and balkanised individualistic teacher culture’ (Chapman, 2004, p.99). Finding 1 therefore suggests that the Leadership at Trinity Academy is *Laissez Faire* or *Autocratic* in nature.

Finding 7 links intrinsically with finding 1, since widespread collaboration is the result of effective timetabling and suitable training (Hopkins, Harris & Jackson, 1997). Staff development aims to create a school rich in social capital, which serves to generate

strong networks and collaborative relations among its members and stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2001). The evidence to support finding 7, shows us that although training was provided about the new marking and feedback policy, 20 out of the 29 questionnaire respondents felt they would benefit from further training to enhance their skill-set. Furthermore, an interviewee (ML1) claims that “CPD is a forgotten art form” at Trinity Academy, which would suggest that the school is showing characteristics of a school with either *Laissez-Faire* or *Autocratic* leadership. On the other hand, the results of the questionnaire are arguably unreliable, as 22 of the 29 respondents also felt that they knew how to use the marking policy to ensure at least good student progress.

Finding 8 is not explicitly linked to an ‘individualised’ teacher culture, however high accountability measures do affect the leadership in SfCC (Chapman, 2004).

Evidence gathered from the interviews and open-ended questionnaire questions highlights similar issues to Chapman in his 2004 project, including the school adopting a ‘short-termist approach’, a reluctance to take risks, and all strategies being underpinned by tightly prepared action plans. For example, the Head Teacher at Trinity Academy states that “the strategic direction of the school [is set] through the action plan...and [decisions are influenced by] getting out of special measures.” ML1 agrees, claiming “[The monitoring process is] purely because of Ofsted coming in. The ethos of the school has changed, it’s more data driven and you’ve got to show you’re doing this, show you’re doing that, more accountability, more learning walks, more review data.” Trinity Academy then, in a bid to make rapid and sufficient improvement, has created a teacher culture that is defined by high accountability measures.

### *Analysis of the 'Professional Relationships' at Trinity Academy*

The following finding is relevant to the continuum of professional relationships on Chapman's Model for Leadership in SFCC:

<b>Finding 2</b>	The Head Teacher perceives professional relationships to be autonomous, however the staff body disagrees.
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Finding 2 demonstrates the contradiction between the hierarchical structure of schools and the idea of distributed leadership (Hatcher, 2010) in that the leadership of Trinity Academy remains hierarchical despite the use of terms which might suggest a more distributed approach (Fitzgerald & Gunter, 2008). As an example, the Head Teacher (HT) explains that, "The strategic intent of the leadership... is filtered down to and dispersed through the staff." Although the term 'dispersed' has been used here, it is 'the intent of the leadership' that suggests a hierarchical structure is still in place. Furthermore, ML1 adds, "For me, the decisions are made by the Head. The Head, SLT 2, SLT 3, etc. Some of the ideas they [the staff] have had have been brilliant, but not been put in to place because they just don't suit their [SLT] mind set, and their mind set is the most important mind-set in the school by a mile." The questionnaire also highlights that 16 out of 29 staff believe that decisions at Trinity Academy are made by the HT and the SLT. That said, staff at all levels agree that the new marking and feedback policy was devised by SLT *alongside* staff, and 11 staff felt that their Head of Department does have the autonomy to make decisions at school. As a result, we can see features of 'semi-dispersed' leadership

in the implementation of the marking policy, however it is arguable that the non-autonomous approach to professional relationships prevails in this instance.

### *Conclusion to research question 3*

Having compared the findings about the marking policies, teacher culture and professional relationships with the characteristics in figure 5, the evidence suggests that Trinity Academy shares most characteristics with a school that has an autocratic approach to leadership, and one that displays tactical improvement strategies. This conclusion has been drawn on the basis of the schools lack of *widespread* collaboration on a school-level, and the professional relationships being non-autonomous in nature, despite the efforts of the terminology used by the HT. Moreover, the evidence suggests that the school's relationships with external agents and high accountability measures are factors affecting the autonomy of staff and their teacher culture. See figure 6 below for a visual representation of the conclusions drawn to research question 3 which is also supported by the findings in research questions 1 and 2. The 'X' represents the position of Trinity Academy on Chapman's model.

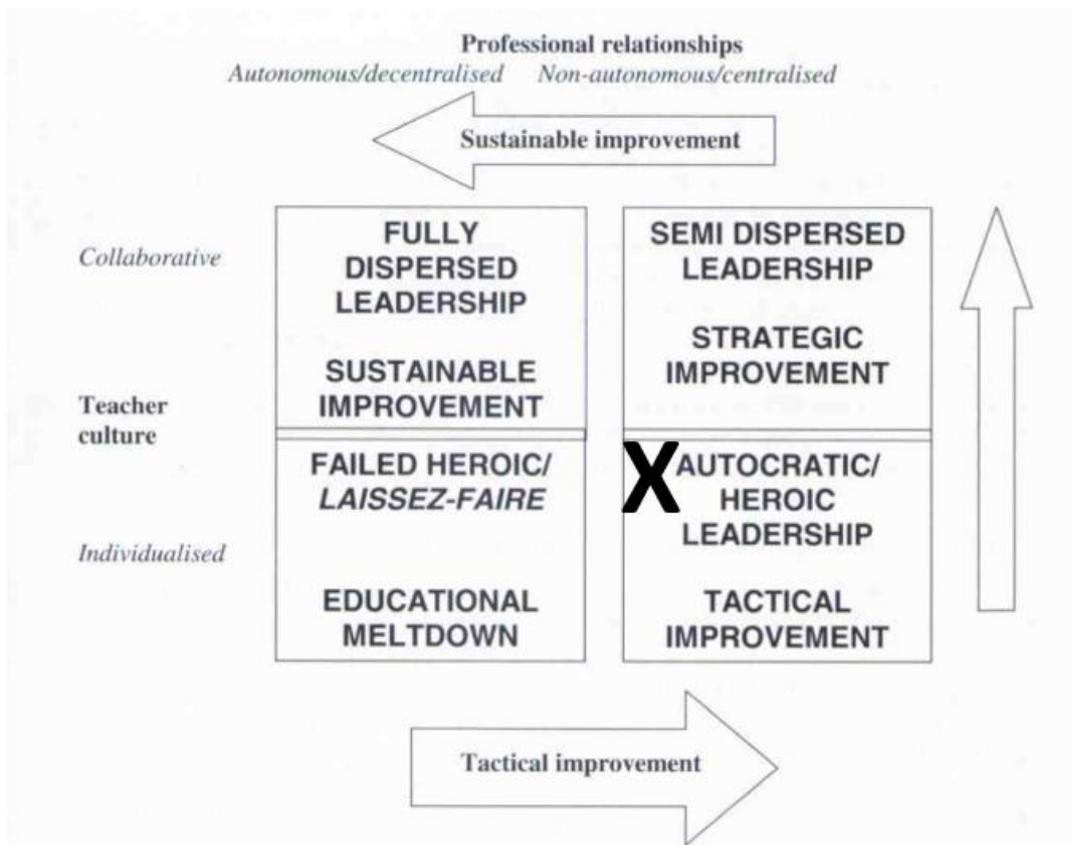


Figure 6: The position of Trinity Academy on Chapman's Model for Leadership in SfCC.

The next chapter forms the *Conclusions and Recommendations* section of this paper, which are supported by the analysis of research question 4.

## Conclusions and recommendations

This study sought to discover how effective the new marking and feedback policy is at Trinity Academy, and to what extent it can be used as an instrument for improvement. This paper aimed to benefit the improvement efforts of the school, and contribute to the wider fields of school improvement and effectiveness literature. This chapter will draw conclusions from the study, and offer recommendations as to how Trinity Academy can use the marking policy to move towards sustainable school improvement according to Chapman's model of Leadership for SfCC, therefore providing hypotheses to answer research question 4. The conclusions will be structured according to teacher culture and professional relationships.

#### *Conclusions and recommendations for Teacher Culture*

To avoid a 'fragmented and balkanised individualistic teacher culture' (Chapman, 2004, p.99), an improving school must ensure that widespread collaboration holds the staff body together. As Hopkins, Harris & Jackson (1997) allude, school wide collaboration is created through effective timetabling and suitable training. Although pockets of successful departmental collaboration at Trinity Academy have been found, more staff development is needed to create collaboration between the teaching staff and the leadership team. Moreover, Chapman (2004) found that schools achieving sustainable improvement regard CPD as the key to moving forward.

Equally, Continuous Professional Development is needed to enhance the skills of staff as, according to the characteristics of Chapman's model, a school cannot achieve sustainable improvement unless the knowledge base of its staff is sufficient. Furthermore, an improving school should focus on the effectiveness of its teaching and learning, with a view to improving student outcomes (Stoll, 1999). Consequently,

in relation to the marking policy at Trinity Academy, the leadership must ensure that staff feel adequately developed to provide effective feedback, as Black and Wiliam (1998b) warn us that a low skill set of staff results in poor quality feedback and therefore poor student outcomes. Having said this, other contributing factors to student outcomes must not be overlooked, as teaching and learning extends beyond formative assessment.

In order for a school to improve, Chapman (2004) suggests that teachers need to be data rich, and discuss data regularly with colleagues and students. The Head Teacher admitted that “An inspection of a school in our situation is data driven”, so the SLT at Trinity Academy should prioritise developing not only the formative assessment skills of staff, but also their data analysis skills.

This study has shown that creating the marking policy collaboratively has benefitted the teacher culture of Trinity Academy. Wiles (2008) agrees that classroom teachers should be involved in policy development, as they are the key to all curriculum work. The teaching staff and leadership team at Trinity Academy successfully collaborated to devise the new marking policy, however, classroom teachers are not involved with the monitoring of the system which is an issue discussed in the following section.

### *Conclusions and recommendations for Professional Relationships*

Improving schools must be aware of the contradiction between the hierarchical structure of schools and the idea of distributed leadership (Hatcher, 2010). To suggest that the leadership of a school is dispersed, high levels of collaboration and autonomous relationships between staff should be prevalent which has not been found at Trinity Academy. The evidence outlined in this study shows that the school fosters non-autonomous relationships, due to the process of monitoring the marking

policy as discussed below. Trinity Academy must consequently create opportunities for teachers at all levels to develop their leadership capacity and implement autonomous performance management systems.

In order for a school to promote sustainable improvement, few formal monitoring and accountability systems should be implemented, in order to promote mutual respect and trust within the staff body (Chapman, 2004). As outlined previously in this paper, the monitoring process of the marking policy is carried out by the Senior Leadership Team through scrutinising the books of classroom teachers. The evidence collected concerning the 'book scrutinies' shows that his hierarchical system at Trinity Academy isolates and divides teachers (Grogan, 2013).

Regular book scrutinies demonstrate that Trinity Academy is implementing high levels of monitoring, which pervade areas of school life in an attempt to minimise variations in practices. This is a characteristic, if we refer back to figure 5, of a school that has autocratic leadership. In order for Trinity Academy to move towards sustainable improvement, more informal monitoring and accountability systems should be implemented, in order to generate trust and respect between colleagues at all levels. If strong networks between staff are developed at Trinity Academy, external accountability measures will have a reduced influence over internal systems, and will therefore benefit both the teacher culture and professional relationships of the school.

*Summary of recommendations: How can Trinity Academy use the marking policy to move towards sustainable improvement?*

In order for Trinity Academy to make their 'journey' (Jackson, 2000) from tactical to sustainable improvement, figure 7 illustrates a suggested trajectory for the school to

take, which highlights that a move to ‘strategic improvement’ is first necessary before ‘sustainable improvement’ is achieved.

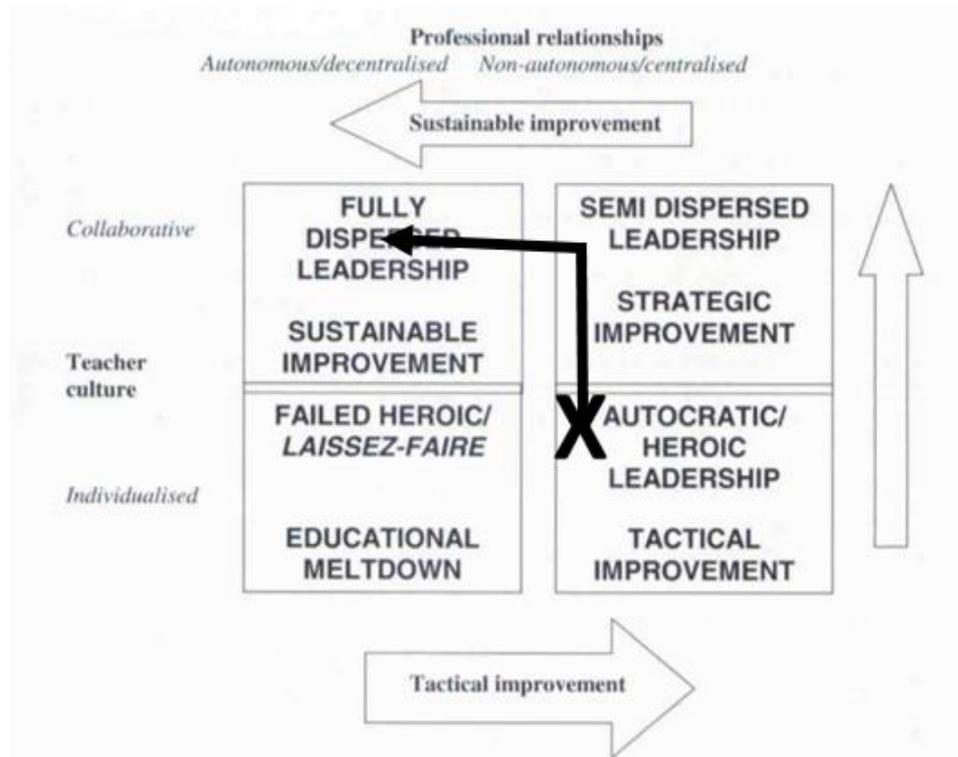


Figure 7: A suggested journey for Trinity Academy

In order to reach each stage of its ‘journey’, Trinity Academy is recommended to consider the following points against the findings of this study:

To achieve sustainable improvement:	To achieve strategic improvement:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A ‘Collaborative Teacher Culture’ must be evident within the staff body when using the marking policy. Classroom teachers should have autonomy to regularly discuss and evaluate the effectiveness of the policy and to give feedback to the leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The CPD needs of the staff must be met, with specific attention paid to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) The collaboration between staff at all levels. Teaching staff should be able to identify gaps in their knowledge and work together with the SLT to close them.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The 'book scrutiny' process should be less formal, as with other internal monitoring systems, and should include input from teaching staff to avoid creating a hierarchical structure. For example, classroom teachers could share good marking practice with other classroom teachers.</li> <li>- The ability of all staff to manipulate and discuss data should be developed. Providing effective formative assessment to students should close the gap between their actual level and their reference level (Black &amp; Wiliam, 1998b). A teacher needs to be confident with data manipulation in order for feedback to improve student outcomes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) Giving effective feedback to generate good student outcomes. Even if staff feel they use the marking policy to good effect, further, perhaps departmental development should be available.</li> <li>c) CPD must be focused on a variety of aspects of teaching and learning, not just formative assessment. Marking forms a section of teaching and learning at a school, however Trinity Academy should look at all aspects of effective classroom practice to enhance student outcomes and teacher confidence.</li> </ul>
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### *Final considerations*

The implementation of the new marking policy has not only highlighted the leadership approach at Trinity Academy, but has also provided findings that will contribute to the schools continued improvement. Whilst the above recommendations have been assimilated for Trinity Academy, other schools may wish to consider the conclusions against their marking policy and improvement strategies. Chapman's Model of Leadership for SfCC is limited to providing an overview of the dominant leadership in a school, therefore leaders should remember that 'one size of improvement strategy does not fit all' (Stoll, 1999, p. 523) and must consequently tailor their improvement strategies to best meet the needs of students and teachers in their context.

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## Appendix 1: The marking and Feedback policy at Trinity Academy

Marking and feedback should be used to extend learning and should impact positively on student progress. The assessment of learning and progress and the subsequent feedback to a student should be driven by the information we have about them – their starting points within that concept area or skill as well as their target grade or target level in that subject.

Marking and feedback should be carried out in line with departmental marking and feedback policies, which should give clear guidance as to what is marked, how it is marked as well as how often marking should take place.

When marking and feedback is carried out in books we expect to see:

- What has been done well, reflecting good progress for that student – this should be acknowledged, commented on or highlighted in green.

Symbol identifying mistake	Meaning
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- Areas for development,

misconceptions that need to be addressed or where further learning and progress is required for that student – this should be acknowledged, commented on or highlighted in pink.

- 'Respond to Feedback' time should then be given for the students to respond to the 'pink to think' prompt, to **upgrade their marking** and show progress.
- Student response should also then be highlighted by the students with a yellow marker
- Student responses should then be checked for accuracy and acknowledged by the teacher.

### Marking for Literacy Development

All teachers at Trinity Academy are teachers of literacy. We therefore should take a consistent approach to developing our students' literacy skills by giving them helpful feedback on their spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Literacy errors should be marked in pink and the following symbols should be used in line with the school policy:

Marking symbols to be used in departments

<b>(to be placed in the margin)</b>	
Sp <u>freind</u>	Spelling error underlined section of the word
C	A capital letter is needed
NP//	New paragraph
P      Where is your work Circle where the error has occurred	Check your punctuation. Have you missed anything out?
Sentences	Check your sentences. Do they make sense or do you allow different sentences to merge into the same long sentence?
Gr      I <u>seen</u> the driver	Check your grammar
Underline titles and headings	

### **Presentation**

All books should have the Gold Standard insert stuck clearly on to books and it should be evident that students take pride in their work, and where necessary they should be given helpful feedback to improve their presentation, according to the gold standard criteria:

- Titles underlined with a ruler
- The date in the margin
- No incomplete work or gaps in your book – where work is missed it is caught up as quickly as possible
- All feedback is responded to in the yellow box
- Use blue or black biro
- Diagrams and tables should be in pencil
- Use all of the space in your book and make your work clear – no doodles or graffiti
- Make sure your work is your best effort – your book will need to be a key revision resource

### **Supporting Disadvantaged and SEND students with effective marking and feedback**

The school operates a 'top of the pile' approach to supporting our disadvantaged students with effective feedback in order to help close the learning gap in school. Teachers should ensure that disadvantaged and SEND students receive timely and incisive feedback that helps them to make progress in their learning. All of our students are entitled to effective marking and feedback - our 'top of the pile' approach is aimed at ensuring teachers mark SEND and disadvantaged student's books first whenever they do any marking. This will ensure that these pupils always have the highest quality feedback which will help them to improve faster.

### **Quality Assurance of Marking and Feedback**

In order to evaluate and to support the quality of marking and feedback given by staff, Senior and Middle leaders will carry out regular scrutiny of work events.

During this process, senior and middle leaders will request books from specific students. They will triangulate the progress the students are making over time in books with assessment and progress data for the students and their class. The impact of the marking will be evaluated and feedback will be given to teachers, as well as targets to improve, in line with departmental marking and feedback policies. Follow up scrutiny of work events will be scheduled to evaluate the impact of feedback and to determine the next support steps.

When work is sampled by senior leaders, through either work scrutiny, case conferences or as part of the new lesson observation process; the following aspects of the bookwork, feedback and marking will be explored:

Comparing the standard of work against the students' target grade – does the level of work expected and achieved by the student match this grade?

Are the students doing enough work in each lesson?

PP and SEN student books - are these students given the feedback they need to improve? Is the quality of their work tightly monitored? Is the 'top of the pile' policy in evidence?

Comparing books from students with different levels of ability - is the work the same? Are the students being given work appropriate to them? Is the feedback different?

#### Feedback:

Are the teachers providing pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills?

#### Progress:

Are students using feedback effectively to improve their work? Is all work complete? Is there any lost learning from absence?

#### Presentation:

Is work well presented according to Gold Standard guidelines and are students taking pride in their work?

#### Literacy:

Is there effective feedback on spelling, punctuation and grammar in line with guidelines helps students improve literacy?

### **Marking and Feedback at Trinity Academy**

At Trinity Academy, feedback is defined as a response to student work and learning. This can be marking, discussion and formal or informal meetings. We believe that it is through effective formative assessment practice that information and data can be utilised to support planning, target setting and for celebrating achievements. It encourages students to reflect on their own achievement and to celebrate their success.

We value the success, achievement and progress of every student and that every student in school can learn and achieve to their full potential. We believe that effective marking and feedback is an essential opportunity for:

- students to know how well they have done, and what they need to do next
- students to feel happy about success and confident to extend themselves
- teachers to assess and evaluate student progress
- teachers to celebrate, reinforce and challenge
- parents to be aware of the progress their child is making over time.

### **The Purpose of Marking and Feedback**

### **For teachers**

- Demonstrates student's knowledge and skills achieved.
- Indicates the next step for learning.
- Indicates levels of achievement.
- Informs future planning.
- Informs changes in medium or short term planning.
- Provides a review of the range of achievement.
- Establishes a teacher / pupil dialogue about learning.

### **For students**

- Provides a personal response.
- Acknowledges achievements.
- Encourages students to reflect upon their efforts
- Allows students to interact with the adult giving feedback.
- Teaches students that feedback on areas to develop or targets is a normal, positive step in learning new skills.
- Teaches students that feedback on their work is an essential element of the learning process designed to support positively and not to criticise destructively.

### **For parents and other audiences**

- Indicates points for individual development and progress.
- Shows what the school values in student's work.
- Demonstrates expectations.
- Shows how the teacher has worked with and acknowledged the efforts of a student

### **Effective Marking and Feedback**

#### **Effective Marking and Feedback takes place when:**

- Marking and feedback is driven by individual information about the student – their starting points within that concept area and their target grade or level in that subject.
- Comments identify what has been done well and what still needs improvement.
- Guidance is given on how to make the improvement.

- Time is put aside for the improvements to take place and for pupils to follow up the comments as part of the overall learning process.
- Feedback ensures that thinking takes place.
- Marking is selective, focuses on the specific learning that has taken place and is related to the objective.
- The Marking and Feedback policy is consistently followed by teachers across the whole school.

### **Procedure**

- Look for progress and success before areas to develop. Effective marking is supportive and positive for students
- Link marking to the learning outcomes and success criteria. Refer to these when giving written and verbal feedback.
- Link marking to targets: individual Special Educational Needs and Disabilities – (SEND) groups, layered targets, etc. as appropriate.
- Give positive public feedback for high achievement, as an illustration of completion of the learning objective and success criteria.
- Look for persistent errors and patterns of errors, rather than every error made: be selective and sensitive in marking. I.e. not every incorrect spelling will be highlighted, only words that an individual student should be reasonably expected to know.
- Ensure work is marked regularly and promptly after completion, to allow effective and immediate feedback to be given.

### **Written Feedback**

Written feedback should refer to the learning intention for the lesson and where appropriate to the student's individual target(s).

Written comments should be positive and constructive, so that the student understands how their work or performance can be improved.

If the teacher marks a piece of work without the student present, time should be given to allow the student to read the feedback provided and where appropriate act upon it.

## **Appendix 2: Semi- structured interview (Questions and prompts)**

### **Teacher culture: Is it collaborative or individualised?**

**Do you feel that the staff body is fully invested to the improvement of the school? How so?**

**Do you feel part of a school wide team?**

- Do the staff?
- Do you, or SLT, work closely with any departments?

**Within departments, do staff work collaboratively towards the improvement of teaching and learning initiatives?**

- Marking policy
- Is data use to improve practice?

**Do you feel like policies at school are adhered to by the majority of staff?**

- E.g. marking policy

### **Professional relationships: Are they autonomous or non-autonomous?**

**How would you describe relationships between the staff at school?**

- Within departments
- Between middle leaders and SLT
- Between teachers and SLT

**Do you, or other members of the SLT monitor the policies used by staff? e.g marking policy.**

- Do they have an impact on practice? What impact?

**Who is in charge of decision making at school?**

- Day to day decisions
- Strategic – new policies
- Is there any delegation to middle leaders?

**What factors influence the decisions that are made at school?**

- Any external pressure?

**Define what new/old marking policy means.**

**Why was the previous marking and feedback policy at Trinity Academy deemed inadequate?**

- By whom?

**In terms of the marking policy, after the Ofsted judgement, what changes were made?**

- Were these changes easy to implement? On what time scale?

- How was the new marking and feedback policy introduced?
- Who devised the new policy?

**How effective is the new marking and feedback policy?**

- For staff? - has it improved practice?
- Student's learning activities? Are they more/less active or independent?
- Will it mean enhanced student outcomes in the future in your opinion?

**What has been the impact of introducing a new marking policy on the overall progress the school is making?**

- Has it worked towards a better Ofsted judgement/ contribute towards the action plan?

**In your opinion, what does the school need to do in order to improve further?**

- In terms of the marking and feedback policy?
- Knowledge and skills of staff

**Is there anything else that you would like to mention that you feel hasn't been covered?**

**Thank respondent again for giving up their time.**

## Appendix 3: Final version of the questionnaire

**Background of the study:** This questionnaire will be used for a case study on School Improvement, which will form part of a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Warwick. The aim of the project is to identify how a school can achieve sustainable school improvement through the implementation of new policies.

**Confidentiality:** This questionnaire is completely anonymous, and the school will also remain anonymous throughout the course of the project.

**Consent:** This questionnaire is completely voluntary. In completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent for your responses to be analysed and used for the purpose of this project.

### What is your role within the department?

- Teacher
- KS3/4/5 co-ordinator
- Head of Department
- Other (please write in ) \_\_\_\_\_

*For the following questions, please circle ONE response.*

#### 1. In your opinion, is the whole staff body fully invested in the improvement of the school?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 2. Do you feel part of a school-wide team?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 3. Does your department work closely with the Senior Leadership Team?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 4. Do you work collaboratively with your department in order to improve your teaching and learning practice?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 5. In your opinion, do Heads of Departments have the autonomy to make decisions about their department?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 6. In your opinion, before the special measures judgement, did marking and feedback help students to make at least good progress across the school?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

#### 7. Before the special measures judgement, did teachers mark in the same way across the school?

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**8. Do you know how to use the new marking policy<sup>2</sup> to ensure that students make at least good progress?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**9. Do you feel like you would benefit from further CPD to improve the quality of your marking and feedback?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**10. Do you use the new marking policy consistently (every time you mark)?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**11. Has your department adapted the new marking and feedback policy in any way?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**12a) Has the new marking policy impacted on the quality of your feedback?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**12b) In what way?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**13a) When students respond to your marking, does it have an impact?**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**13b) In what way?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**14a) Does the Senior Leadership Team monitor the use of the marking policy? (If you answer 'no' go to Q15)**

YES                      NO                      YES AND NO                      UNSURE

**14b) What impact does this monitoring have on your practice?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

***For the following questions, please add as much detail as you deem necessary.***

**15. Who is in charge of making decisions at school?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- <sup>2</sup> <sup>2</sup> What has been done well, acknowledged, commented on or highlighted in green.
- Areas for development acknowledged, commented on or highlighted in pink.
- 'Respond to Feedback' time should then be given for the students to **upgrade their marking** and show progress.
- Student response should also then be highlighted by the students with a yellow marker.

**16. Who devised the new marking and feedback policy?**

---

---

**17. Who introduced the new marking policy to you?**

---

---

---

**18. What impact do you *think* the new marking and feedback policy will have on student outcomes at GCSE?**

---

---

---

**Are there any further comments you would like to make that you feel are relevant to the topic of the above questions?**

**THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.**

**YOU MAY BE INVITED TO COMPLETE A FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW IF YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE.**

## **Appendix 4: Ethical approval form**

### **APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL**

**Please note: There will be a penalty of 5 marks deducted from the final dissertation mark for students who do not include a copy of this form with their dissertation submission and/or do not have this form approved by their dissertation supervisor/course leader in advance.**

Name of student: xxxxxxx

Student number: xxxxxxx

Course: Educational Leadership (Teach First) (TIES-X32D)

Dissertation title: A case study on School Improvement: How can the Marking and Feedback policy at Trinity Academy be improved?

Supervisor: xxxxxxxxx

Participants: (if children, specify age range) AND ATTACH A COPY OF YOUR DBS CLEARANCE

Teachers

Senior Leadership Team

Children aged 11-16

Consent - will prior informed consent be obtained?

From participants? YES

From others? N/A

Explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

Questionnaire: There will be a statement on the document stating that the completion of it is voluntary, and in completing it the participant has given their consent.

Interview / Focus group: A statement will be read out stating that the participation is voluntary, and asking the participant to verbalise their consent. Participants will also be notified that, unless they state otherwise, all evidence they provide during the interview is available to be used for the purpose of the dissertation.

Will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status? YES

**Confidentiality**

Will confidentiality be assured? YES

How will confidentiality be ensured?

Questionnaire: For both teachers and students, the questionnaires will remain anonymous and no names will be asked for on the document.

Interview / Focus group: Members of Senior Leadership Team and the student focus group will not be asked to state their names. In the analysis participants will be referred to as SLT1, SLT2 and student 1, student 2 and so on.

### **Protection of participants**

How is the safety and well - being of participants to be ensured?

The Academy is given a pseudonym so participants cannot be identified.

I will notify the participants (on the questionnaire and at the beginning of the interviews) about the purpose and outcomes of the project, to avoid the respondents feeling used or excluded.

I will include thanks to the participants at the end of both the questionnaire and the interview.

Is information gathered from participants of a sensitive or personal nature? NO

If yes, describe the procedure for

a) Ensuring confidentiality

N/A

b) Protecting participants from embarrassment or stress

N/A

### **Observational research**

If observational research is to be carried out without prior consent of participants, please specify

a) Situations to be observed

N/A

b) How will privacy and cultural and religious values of participants be taken into account?

N/A

Signed (Student): xxxxxxxx

Date: xxxxxxxx

Signed (Supervisor): xxxxxxxx

Date: xxxxxxxx

Action: Once both you and your supervisor have signed this form take it to your course administrator. If there are any queries, these will be logged and the form sent back to you for amendment and resubmission. Otherwise the form will be signed by your course leader and you will be able to collect a signed copy from your course administrator. The signed copy should be included as an appendix into your assignment/thesis.

.....

### **COURSE LEADER TO COMPLETE**

Approved

Approved with modification or conditions – see below

Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Course Leader Name:

Signed: xxxxxxxx

Date: xxxxxxxx

## **Appendix 5: Participant information sheet**

**You are being invited to participate in a research study that forms part of a Masters dissertation in Educational Leadership.**

**Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not to take part.**

**Who will conduct the research?**

--- xxxxxxxx [Trinity Academy]<sup>3</sup> --- University of Warwick, Coventry CV4 7AL, UK

---

<sup>3</sup> Trinity Academy is being used as a pseudonym for this study.

### **What is the background of the study?**

--- This interview will be used for a case study on School Effectiveness and School Improvement. The aim of the project is to identify how effective the marking policy is at Trinity Academy and how this can contribute to the school's improvement efforts.

### **Why have I been chosen?**

--- You have been chosen because you have been involved at some level in the implementation of the new marking and feedback policy and/or decision making at the school.

### **What would I be asked to do if I took part?**

--- If you choose to take part you will be interviewed once by xxxxxxx.

--- The interview is expected to take 30 minutes.

--- You will be asked questions about the school culture and the marking policy.

--- The interview will be audio recorded, for ease of analysis.

### **What happens to the data collected?**

--- I, xxxxxxx, will use the data collected through this interview to help me analyse the implementation of the policy and its effectiveness.--- I may use quotes gathered at interview to support my conclusions.

### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

--- I will maintain confidentiality by:

- 1) Keeping the identity of [Trinity Academy] anonymous in my dissertation, by using a pseudonym.
- 2) Keeping yourself and other participants anonymous in my dissertation, by using pseudonyms.
- 3) Destroying any recordings of your interviews when necessary, and storing the recordings in encrypted files until then.
- 4) Not discussing your responses with other members of staff at [Trinity Academy].

### **What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?**

--- It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

### **Will I be paid for participating in the research?**

--- You will not be paid or compensated for your time.

### **What is the duration of the research?**

--- You will be interviewed once, for approximately 30 minutes.

### **Where will the research be conducted?**

--- This research, and interview will take place at [Trinity Academy], exact location is to be confirmed.

### **Will the outcomes of the research be published?**

--- The outcomes of this research will go towards my dissertation in Educational Leadership. The University of Warwick will have access to the research, but it is not anticipated that it will be published elsewhere.

### **Contact for further information**

--- Please contact me if you any questions about my research: xxxxxxxx@hotmail.co.uk--- My supervisor's contact is: [xxxxxxx@gmail.com](mailto:xxxxxxx@gmail.com)

## Appendix 6: Participant consent form

**If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below.**

**Please initial each box.**

1. I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask any questions.

2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

3. I understand that the interviews will be audio-recorded.

4. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.

5. I agree that any data collected may be passed to other researchers.

6. I agree that any data collected may be published in anonymous form in academic books or journals.

7. I agree to take part in the project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature