To see if the use of ‘comments only’ on tests affected student learning

Principal Findings

- Almost all students showed an improvement in their term’s results.
- The students in the ‘C’ grade bracket showed the greatest improvement.
- Most students preferred comments but requested that grades would also be included.

Conclusions / Discussion

- Greater discussion among students when they got their comments back – perhaps some of the improvement in learning was due to these discussions?
- The student comments on the questionnaire showed that they tended to use grades for comparison in the class rather than learning.
- Perhaps we, as teachers, should be more positive when dealing with students and help them to identify the more important points in a topic, particularly in pre-Leaving Certificate year.
- Giving comments only on student tests took more time than awarding a numerical or grade value.
- I would use the ‘comment only’ method again particularly with a pre-Leaving Certificate class finding it hard to ‘settle down’ following transition year.

What the students thought …..

Some student comments from the questionnaire:
- ‘comments motivate learning’
- ‘comments let you know where you went wrong’
- ‘comments give you more interaction with the teacher and are more personal’
- ‘high grades are more rewarding as they let you know your place in the class’
- ‘comments are a waste of teachers time’
- ‘negative comments hit home’
- ‘comments don’t show if you are improving or not’
- ‘grades are forgotten but comments aren’t’
- ‘low grades dishearten’
- ‘grades allow you to compare results’
- ‘grades don’t give you your strong or weak points’