

## **Homework and Parental Engagement**

### **What do we do at the moment?**

Stage Booklets were issued to all parents/carers at the start of the present academic year. Copies are available via the Class Pages on the School website. These provide summary details of the homework that will be issued to pupils and general areas of activity.

The majority of homework involves tasks in reading, writing and maths. Project work related to topical subjects (e.g. Egyptians, Vikings, Victorians) also features. Homework for a given week is issued on a Monday for completion by the Friday.

### **What does the Scottish Government say about homework?**

The Scottish Government's statement around homework dates from 2004. It sets out the benefits as:

Homework helps your child to:

- learn how to organise and manage their time
- take more responsibility for their own learning
- practise and build on what they have learned at school
- develop confidence to deal with frustrations, overcome difficulties and solve problems
- learn and work independently in the future.

In its recent National Improvement Framework the Scottish Government set out a strategy to help all children attain their full potential. It sees parental engagement as a key factor in this and aims to help parents support their children's learning at home.

### **So why are we looking at homework now?**

Some primary schools in Scotland, including at least one in Edinburgh, have stopped providing routine weekly homework tasks to children. In the case of the Edinburgh school they have restricted literacy and numeracy homework to P1 and P7 groups. Instead children are encouraged to read for themselves and make time for play.

### **What do the children think?**

A quick straw poll of one of the Junior Classes at Craiglockhart asked:

1. Do you like homework?	Yes	9	No	17
2. Do you think homework is necessary?	Yes	9	No	17
3. Does homework help you become a successful learner?	Yes	11	No	15

### ***Yes – Further comments***

You can show your mum and dad what you can do

Your parents can see how you are getting on with your learning

You get to do subjects you enjoy at home

You learn more because you are spending more time on learning

You can practice things you don't understand or you find tricky

It gets you ready for harder work at high school and you do lots of homework at high school so you need to practice doing it

### **No – Further comments**

You don't need to do anymore spelling/maths as you've done them all day at school  
Sometimes you can't do things as a family because you have got homework to do  
I end up rushing it and not learning anything  
If your parents are split up you need to be organised and sometimes you forget to do it  
It was fun in P1/2 as you were learning new things and it was easy  
You already have homework from clubs  
It takes up your free times especially if you go to lots of clubs – never have any free time  
It makes everyone grumpy

4. What has the biggest impact on your free time? Clubs

### **What do experts say?**

Children use their short term or “working” memory when learning in class. We can recognise this process when we walk into a room and forget the reason for doing so – we've displaced the original thought in the “short term” memory with the experience of the new environment we've entered. Consolidation by review of what you have learnt is therefore important.

An analysis of all relevant educational studies between 1987 – 2003 suggests that the amount of homework done and achievement outcomes are linked: practice makes perfect!  
[<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/00346543076001001>]

Professor John Hattie's work [see for example <http://blog.irisconnect.com/uk/community/blog/john-hattie-10-myths-about-student-achievement/>], on the other hand, suggests homework has limited impact on performance in Primary School, but has a more marked impact on Secondary School. He notes that the worst form of homework is a project task; the best is a task that reinforces what has already been learnt.

Homework clubs do not necessarily offer benefits. It is an environment that avoids parents/carers doing the homework themselves. On the other hand it can lead to unwanted peer pressure.

### **What about other countries?**

The typical amount of homework given to children in other countries varies greatly. However, many countries give homework to primary school age groups [See, for example, <http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/does-homework-help-or-hinder-young-children-10484928.html>]. There is no correlation between the extent of homework and academic performance. A large volume of homework is seen as a negative impact due to a combination of anxiety among pupils and a source of potential argument between parents/carers and children when looking to get tasks completed.

We heard at the discussion forum about the education system in Finland where there isn't a similar focus on homework tasks at Primary School. Finland has ranked higher than the UK in international comparisons (<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/>)

### **Summary**

In short, there are many views among experts regarding the value and nature of homework. Our children can benefit from tasks that consolidate their learning as long as they are not given too many tasks to do. Homework also helps parents/carers see the work that children are engaged with and follow their progress. Homework tasks that don't engage children can be counter-productive both in immediate learning and in putting children off the habit of homework required in High School to develop further learning.