

Connecting Learning at Home and at School

Understanding the purpose of homework

Case Study – Warrnambool East Primary School

Background

Warrnambool East Primary School is situated in the coastal town of Warrnambool some 260kms southwest of Melbourne. The school seeks to assist students assume some responsibility for their own learning. The school has developed homework guidelines to help families and students achieve this end. These guidelines are set out below.

Purpose

The broad purpose for homework is to promote good habits which prepare students for life long learning. Homework provides opportunities for families to participate in and support their child's education. School related activities completed at home benefit students by complementing classroom learning, fostering good work habits and providing an opportunity for students to be responsible for their own learning. Homework also provides for children to have the opportunity to demonstrate their learning at home. Homework includes quality time spent at home with students reflecting on work and life at school.

The purpose of homework is to:

- foster and build links and relationships between home and school, parent and child
- encourage a personal and family responsibility for learning
- generate quality time spent at home with students reflecting on work and life at school.

Homework can also be classified into three groups:

- **Directed homework** (driven by the teacher, supported by the student and family)
- **Negotiated homework** (driven by the family, supported by the student and the teacher)
- **Independent homework** (driven by the student, supported by the family and teacher).

Broad guidelines

Homework should:

- be the shared responsibility of teachers, students and their families
- be appropriate to the skill level and age of the student and offer each student a measure of success
- be balanced with a diverse range of recreational and home/family activities
- be purposeful, meaningful to the student and their learning goals
- have regard for the fact that students have participated in a full day of school work
- not expect that parents be teachers
- duration of homework should not exceed 30 minutes, three nights per week.

Implementation

Homework is not a blanket arrangement made for all students in a particular year level as consideration is given to the differing needs and abilities of students. Homework arrangements will be made within the following three categories:



Directed homework (driven by the teacher: supported by the student and family)

Directed Homework is where there is shared responsibility for homework by families, students and teachers. The tasks, whilst requiring minimal supervision and teaching by families, include activities which relate to class learning and are considered to be general expectations for home involvement in student learning. Students should enjoy the work and be self-motivated to do it.

Homework tasks completed at home should be open-ended so that students are able to achieve at their own level of skill and ability. Such tasks aim to encourage independence, work habits, organisational and time management skills. This homework model involves a higher level of independent family responsibility, involvement and monitoring.

Such activities could involve:

- take home books to be read with families and signed by families where appropriate
- regular reading (e.g. reading logs) and writing – books, magazines, newspapers, visiting the library, writing stories, letters, cards, lists
- completing unfinished class work or catching up on school work
- research activities: collecting information using resources readily available in the home
- spending quality time at home reflecting on school activities with their families and friends
- practice in learning tools and skills – spelling, tables, speaking, listening
- organising time for recreational and home activities – play, chores, sport, games, TV
- spending time getting prepared for school – sports, notes, readers, lunch boxes, school clothes
- bedtime reading for recreation and enjoyment and/ sharing books with families, including brothers and sisters.

Negotiated homework (driven by the family: supported by the student and the teacher)

Negotiated Homework is where the family and the student take responsibility for homework.

- Families and students, in consultation with their teacher, can request homework programs which are individualised and specific to the student's needs and requirements.
- The student and family are clear about the purposes, goals and meaning of the program and that the student experiences success and can see improvement.
- Programs are designed to target the particular needs of the individual student and will specify the amount and type of tasks and the time required for completion.
- Families and teachers will negotiate, identify and document the goals of the homework package.
- Teachers will support students and families by providing resource materials to assist at home.
- The teacher will set the tasks, provide materials and follow up with correction and advice.
- The role of families in how they can provide support to the students' goals will be discussed.
- Regular communication in the form of family/teacher interviews will be arranged to monitor and reflect on the homework program.
- Commitment to the program must be ensured by the family, student and teacher.

Independent Homework (driven by the student: supported by the family and teacher)

Independent homework is where homework is initiated and generated by the student who desires to complete work based on their own interests and / or school tasks or projects. This homework type is independent of both home and school; it is not dependent on family supervision but will be enhanced by family support and interest. These homework tasks are not school requirements, will not be checked or corrected except where the work contributes to a class project. The value of self-initiated homework is that it provides practice and experience in planning, organisation and time management. As learners, students who initiate their own homework tasks are exhibiting independence and responsibility for their own learning.

Such tasks may include:

- self-initiated reading, writing or drawing for research, interest or enjoyment
- independent research, information collecting, project work
- unfinished school work or skills practice
- work planned, completed and owned by the student who may or may not see it related to their school program.

Evaluation

The homework program will be evaluated annually. Families and students will be involved in the review process.