

HOMework



school policy

November 2009

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introductory statement

This policy was formulated as a result of a comprehensive review during the 2008/2009 school year. It involved

- reflection on educational publications; the *Primary School Curriculum*; relevant legislation; websites; and consultation regarding best practice;
- a review of existing policy and practice to identify the issues that needed to be addressed, and to assist in focusing the aims of this new policy (ref Appendix 1), with reference to other school policies that have a direct link with homework (eg SEN, etc);
- an in-school consultation process that involved a whole-school survey of the BOM, teachers, parents and children, as well as extensive debate and discussion leading to the final draft reflecting the general feedback from all school partners.

1.2 Rationale

Homework fosters independence, self-reliance, self-esteem, co-operation and responsibility and life-long learning. It is an essential part of primary education as it reinforces what children learn in school. It should be integrated into a programme of teaching and learning, forming a part of assessment for learning (AfL), which emphasises each child's active role in his/her own learning. Homework also offers an opportunity for a more meaningful dialogue between school and home.

Homework helps children to build knowledge, develop deeper understandings and connections among concepts to which they have been introduced, and provides an opportunity for them to apply skills they have acquired in school. It also helps children to develop good study habits, and fosters self-discipline, responsibility, and an interest in learning that will benefit them throughout their lives.

The school's homework policy was reviewed at this time, aiming

- to maximise the benefit of homework to the child's learning
- to develop more positive homework practices for the pupils
- to address teachers' and parents' expectations about homework
- to reflect guidelines within the *Primary Curriculum* (1999), through the Department of Education and Science (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and

Assessment (NCCA), as well as the INTO's *Your child and the primary school - tips for parents*.

2. Relationship to characteristic spirit of the school

In St. Patrick's NS, pupils are encouraged to reach their full educational potential, by developing intellectual skills combined with a spirit of inquiry and the capacity to analyse issues critically and constructively, while developing expressive, creative and artistic abilities.

3. Aims

Through this policy, St. Patrick's NS aims

- to develop skills and self discipline that will be of benefit to children in order to enhance learning
- to reinforce work done in class – it allows for revision and practice
- to develop study skills and to assist in establishing an appropriate routine for children in doing their homework
- to promote consistency and a similar approach to homework across all classes
- to encourage children to become independent learners and to revise/ reinforce/ finish work that has begun in school.
- to strengthen links and communication between home and school – *Homework.. a bridge, not a battle*

4. Content of policy

4.1 General information

Homework is part of the overall plan for the school and is assumed to be an extension of the school's daily programme.

The school offers guidance on homework routine (ref 4.7), and facilitates a specialist workshop on more advanced study skills for Sixth Class.

4.2 Homework content

Usually, homework contains a balance between reading, learning and written tasks. This balance is not always possible and can vary considerably from day to day. It will regularly contain reading, spellings, tables, and may contain a maximum of two from the following:

- a written assignment (Language; Mathematics; or SESE)
- rote learning (poetry; Mathematics; SESE)
- Visual arts (eg design or construction activity)
- Music (listening or instrumental activity; learning a song, etc)
- PE (eg physical exercises or activities; ball handling, etc)
- SPHE (Stay Safe exercises, etc)
- Preparation for individual or class project (research; collecting material, etc)

However, it should be noted that homework time devoted to reading and learning is as important as written work. While homework tasks may vary between projects, research, hands-on activities, gathering data etc they should be completed within a manageable time scale, remembering that sometimes completing an activity and recording outcomes may be the task rather than copious writing.

4.3 Differentiation

Every class in the school is made up of children with a wide range of abilities in all aspects of the school curriculum, as well as including children who have special needs and challenges in certain areas. This is catered for through planning for differentiation in all school work, and it is the school's policy that differentiation should also be reflected in homework assignments.

Individual learning abilities and styles are taken into account when assigning homework, through a differentiated programme, reflecting that of the school curriculum programme.

Parents, and pupils, are aware that all pupils in a class do not always get the same homework, and that homework may be assigned by the class teacher or the SEN teacher.

4.4 Assigning homework

All classes get some homework, the amount and level of expectation increasing in quantity and expectation as the children move through the school from Infant classes to Sixth Class, developing their literacy and numeracy skills as well as their level of independence and maturity.

Homework is usually assigned each day from Monday to Thursday, with exceptions on occasions such as birthdays. Assigned homework is explained to children by their teacher in advance, with opportunities for questions and clarifications as required.

Homework is normally assigned by the class teacher, however some pupils may receive homework from their LS/RT teacher, in consultation with the class teacher. Pupils who receive LS/RT support should not get more homework than the rest of the mainstream class.

The purpose of particular homework assignments may include one or more of the following:

- reinforcement of work done in class on that day
- revision
- preparation for a future assignment (eg research, collecting data or materials)
- project work.

Having addressed differentiation in the assigning of homework, a high standard of work to the best of one's ability is expected from all pupils. If homework has been neglected or presented in a careless manner, the following sanctions may be imposed:

1. redo work at home
2. redo work during break time in school
3. meeting of teacher with parent
4. meeting of teacher and principal with parent.

4.5 Homework journal

A homework journal is used by all pupils from First to Sixth Class. As agreed through the school's *Behaviour Charter*, parents are expected to sign the homework journal each evening, having checked that their children have completed the required tasks to

the best of their ability (ref *School Behaviour Charter*, parents' responsibilities).

4.6 Duration of homework

Different children will complete the same homework in different lengths of time, and time spent will vary from day to day and also from the beginning to the end of the school year. It is important to remember that it is the quality and not the quantity of homework that matters. The following are general guidelines:

- Infant classes: up to 20 minutes
- First and Second Classes: 20 to 30 minutes
- Third and Fourth Classes: 30 to 40 minutes
- Fifth and Sixth Classes: 40 minutes to 1 hour

4.7 Homework routine

It is strongly advised that a good homework routine be established by parents from the earliest stages. The following guidelines may be of assistance in this regard:

1. Agree a suitable time for doing homework, taking into account the child's age, and the need for play time, relaxation and family time.
2. Provide a quiet place, with a suitable work surface and suitable seating, free from distractions, interruptions and TV/or other distracting devices.
3. Your child should be sitting comfortably at a table.
4. Consider allocation of time for oral as well as written assignments. Oral work can effectively consolidate that which is learned at school.
5. Encourage good presentation and neatness within a reasonable time.
6. If your child is working independently, be available to help and show an interest in what is being done. Praise your child's efforts at every opportunity.
7. Sign the homework diary (First to Sixth Classes) checking that all homework is complete to a standard that you find acceptable.
8. If, for any reason, homework cannot be done on a particular evening, inform the teacher by writing a note in the homework journal.

4.8 Development of pupils' responsibility for own homework

Pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility towards their homework.

First and Second Class pupils should learn good practice by:

- completing homework assignments₇ carefully and to the best of their ability

- ensuring that homework is signed by a parent (or supervising adult).

Third to Sixth Class should develop good practice by:

- entering homework accurately in homework diary
- ensuring they take home relevant books and copies
- completing homework assignments carefully and to the best of their ability
- ensuring that homework is signed by a parent (or supervising adult)
- handing in homework on time.

4.9 Assessment of homework

Ideally, teachers check homework on a daily basis. However, with large class numbers, it is not always possible to check each child's homework journal every day. As children get older and learn to work independently, some items of homework are checked less often. As part of *Assessment for Learning* (AfL), some items of homework (and class work) may be checked by children themselves, under the direction of the class teacher. This can be a useful part of the learning process for children as it promotes responsibility and self-esteem.

Teachers follow individual systems for the checking of homework, depending on the age level and classroom circumstances. They keep class-based records regarding homework, and follow-up on unsatisfactory homework by contacting parents, if and when necessary. If children persistently do not present satisfactory homework, the matter is referred to the Principal.

When homework is particularly well done or particular effort is made, the children are praised and rewarded through the school's rewards system (ref *Behaviour Charter*).

4.10 Parents

Parents in this school are actively involved with their children's homework, and the high level of interest was reflected in their involvement with the development of this policy. The policy is published on the school's web site, and it includes the following supports (ref *Appendix 1*)

- general guidelines on parental approach to homework
- guidelines on establishing a routine for homework – place, time, preventing interruptions

- suggestions on how parents might monitor homework
- a suggested Homework survival kit, contents of which might include pencils, rulers, tables book etc
- guidelines on what to do if there are difficulties with homework
- occasional helpful hints for homework guide,. eg how we do subtraction...
- homework-related queries, eg television

Parents who have concerns regarding their support role in relation to homework, should consult the class teacher or the principal.

Sometimes parents ask for guidance on how best to approach homework with their child(ren). We offer the following suggestions:

- encourage a positive attitude towards homework in all subjects from an early age
- encourage children to work as independently as possible, and resist over-helping and over-reliance on your support
- encourage children to organise themselves for homework - have all books and materials to hand, with the *homework journal* open to tick off work as it is completed
- check that your child has all necessary text books, homework journal, copies, pencils, mathematical equipment, dictionary, PE clothes etc that will be needed for the next school day
- communicate difficulties to the teacher using the homework journal, or a note.

5. Reference

Primary School Curriculum. Your child's learning, guidelines for parents

Primary School Curriculum, Introduction, Chapter 2

Primary School Curriculum, all subjects

INTO, *Your Child in the Primary School, tips for parents*, p 24

Brian Gilsean, *The essential parents guide to the primary school years*

Websites:

SESS	www.sess.ie
DES	www.education.ie
NCCA	www.ncca.ie

INTO	www.into.ie
IPPN	www.ippn.ie
NPC Primary	www.npc.ie

6. Success criteria

Success will be measured through

- satisfactory homework exercises and assignments submitted by pupils throughout the school
- feedback from teachers, pupils, and parents.

7. Roles and responsibilities

Teachers, children and parents all have individual responsibilities in the implementation of the various aspects of this policy. On-going day-to-day monitoring of homework for each class is the responsibility of each class teacher, with the support of the SEN teacher, as appropriate.

Pupils take increasing levels of personal responsibility for homework as they progress through the school, while parents have an important role in ensuring that homework is done and that all efforts are made to provide the best environment and conditions for doing homework each afternoon.

8. Ratification and communication

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in November 2009, after which it was made available directly to all staff, and to parents through the school's office and the school web site.

9. Implementation

The policy was implemented following ratification.

10. Review

This policy will be fully reviewed in 2015.

Appendix 1

Your child in the primary school - INTO tips for parents. INTO , p32

Homework

Policy in relation to homework will vary from school to school. There are many approaches to homework and what applies in one school may not apply in another. Homework policy is part of the overall plan for the school and the variety of schools means that all schools will not operate the same policy. If your child's school has a policy of giving homework the following routine should be established early.

1. Set aside a quiet regular time.
2. The child should be sitting comfortably at a table.
3. Homework time should include time for oral as well as written work. Oral work, particularly in the early stages of schooling, can consolidate that which is learned through both Irish and English.
4. Encourage your child to keep books and copies clean and tidy.
5. If your child is working independently be available to help and show an interest in what is being done. Praise your child's efforts at every opportunity.
6. If working with your child you feel yourself becoming impatient you should stop. Don't bully or threaten as this will only have a negative effect.
7. If your child is persistently having problems with homework contact the teacher and discuss the difficulties.
8. If, for any reason, homework cannot be done let the teacher know.

Much debate has taken place in recent years on the effects of television/play stations etc on young children. Parents are often concerned about how much viewing time should be allowed. The reality is that most children watch TV or play computer games and, in moderation, this is not a bad thing. Children can learn a great deal and language can be enhanced through television. Don't allow them to watch unsuitable material.

Children in senior classes should be aware of what is going on in the world so encourage them to watch and talk about news items. This will add to their general knowledge and command of language. Do not allow children to watch television while doing homework.

APPENDIX 2

NCCA - AfL – Homework (post-primary)

Web link: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Assessment_for_Learning_AfL_/Homework/

Homework should be meaningful for the teacher and the student. It should serve to re-enforce work done in class and that it should act as a bridge between the work of one day and the next. It should be linked with and integrated into a programme of teaching and learning thereby forming part of the process of assessment for learning. It should be designed in such a way as to offer the students opportunities for self-assessment. It offers an opportunity for a more meaningful dialogue between school and home.

Homework helps students to construct knowledge, develop deeper understandings and connections amongst the concepts to which they have been introduced, and provides an opportunity for them to apply the skills they have acquired. A properly co-ordinated homework policy in school will help students to develop and sustain good study habits. It fosters positive values such as self-discipline, responsibility, and an interest in learning, which will benefit them throughout their lives.

Types of homework assignments

Here are four types of daily homework assignments - preparation, practice, extension, and creative/enrichment assignments.

Preparation

This type of assignment is intended to help students get ready for the next day's classroom lesson. For instance, a reading assignment may be given prior to a lesson. Students might be asked to write their own discussion questions based on the reading assignment. Or, the student may be asked to complete answers to reading review questions from the text.

Practice

By successfully completing practice assignments, students have the opportunity to review and reinforce skills, knowledge, and information presented in a previous lesson. A simple example might be that after a grammar lesson students are asked to write their own sentences and label the ¹³specific grammatical elements presented

in the most recent classroom lesson.

Extension

Extension assignments ask students to expand on skills and/or concepts taught during a previous class. For example, after studying a period in history students might be asked to read an article or book pertaining to that period and report their findings to the class.

Creative/Enrichment

This assignment includes analysing, synthesising and evaluating concepts or skills already taught. Students have an opportunity to develop and apply their own ideas about a topic and prepare a presentation for the teachers or class. One example would be to assign students the task of creating an invention that would solve a problem. Another might be to write a play or short story.

What is stressed here is that not all homework is alike in nature and purpose. In considering different types of homework to set teachers might usefully refer to the different kinds of questioning employed in class.

Assessing homework and offering feedback

Assessment of a piece of homework should be based upon the criteria for success in the particular task set. For example, there is little to be gained by drawing attention to lapses in the surface presentation (spelling, punctuation, etc.) of a piece of student work, if this had not been specifically articulated as one of the criteria against which success was to be measured. Neither is it helpful to set out too many criteria against which the work will be judged.

Teachers might usefully consider whether always giving marks or grades helps students to learn more effectively. In particular, the giving of marks can be counter-productive even when they are accompanied by the teacher's comments as to how students might improve. Students all too often ignore the helpful comments and pay attention solely to the marks. Those who have received low marks, then, merely see themselves failing to achieve while those whose marks are high can neglect to look for the specific direction as to the strengths in their work and the areas where they might need to improve.

Comment-only Marking

It is important to bear in mind that giving a mark in itself does not help students to understand how they might improve their work. The assessment is not formative in intention and it will do little or nothing for learning. In fact, giving marks or grades cancels out the impact of formative comments. In adopting the approach of comment-only marking the teacher gives feedback in three key areas in the student's learning cycle:

- what the student has done right
- what weaknesses there are in the student's work
- what the next step/s should be to improve performance or understanding

This kind of feedback will be most helpful when the learning intentions and criteria for success are clearly understood by the students. The teacher's comments should relate to the task in hand, the learning intention and the criteria for success.

Where a school (or a subject department within a school) adopts a policy of comment-only marking, this should be explained to parents so that they understand what is happening and can be supportive to students in responding to feedback. In this way comment-only marking can become an important part of the school's practice of reporting to parents.

Comment-only marking does not preclude the giving of marks or grades to an assignment. The teacher can record the marks he/she awards to each assignment and use them to build up a picture of summative achievement for the student.

[Key principles of AfL](#)

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