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Homework – a non-pressured and realistic experience

There has been some interesting news media comments made recently about the value of homework tasks in primary schools. A recent highly regarded study by professor John Hattie (Auckland University) has sparked some interest in this debate. The traditional *hard rules* about homework, and the pressures placed on teachers, parents and the children to be engaged in homework every night have been challenged. In recent times there has been a change in perception about the worth of homework, and many parents are seeking more time at home for their children to engage in a variety of special interest activities after school. At this school we ask our teachers not to set homework *for the sake of it* or just to please those parents who keep insisting on it.

It is acknowledged that for most parents there is an expectation that there will usually be some home study set for their children and this does not need to be every night of the week. This is not an unrealistic expectation as we all know that what is learned inside the classroom can be further developed through a variety of work activities at home and there are many benefits in establishing purposeful study patterns. It is important to understand however that for children in their younger years considerable help at home is usually essential for any homework to be effective. Children at a young age who are left in a quiet place to 'finish' their homework on their own may quickly see this as a 'chore'. As the 'chore' becomes boring, with no-one to share with, the child can quickly go off task and be found to be doing some other more stimulating activity. Unfortunately this pattern can become a habit, as the child gets older.

For our primary aged children the homework tasks should not be too lengthy and should be manageable for parents to be involved. The key point here is that in their earlier years children need to enjoy and be enthusiastic about school activities completed at home. This can usually only be achieved through sharing the activity with an adult or older sibling. A little school-based "non pressured" activity with a parent close by to share and participate is the best recipe for success. The process of having a conversation and sharing the homework experience with your child will not only support a learning focus being presented at school, but will significantly lift your child's interest and enthusiasm for it. It does not need to be a lengthy exercise and it should always be set with realistic and relevant goals in mind. Teachers are advised to set homework carefully to ensure it has relevancy to the programmes they are developing at school. If there is good relevancy to the programmes on offer at school it will add value to the learning and open up further lines of enquiry.

Homework does not always need to be generated from school. It can be taking time out to have that very important conversation "Let's talk about what you are learning at school", and encouraging good discussion through 'open' probing questions. Having this type of conversation with children on a regular basis does much to consolidate the learning at school, and this is one of the key objectives of 'homework'. Encouraging further inquiry through enthusiastic discussion assists the process of a child gradually becoming independent with their home study.

Here are some other tips to add variety to your involvement with homework:

- Read to your child at night

- Let your child read a piece of his or her own writing or from book taken home

- Have fun with some words that have impacted on the child from that story

- Have fun with some maths games

- Check out and share your own knowledge of the topic being studied at school

- Search for more information (books at home / internet sites)

Check out some interesting links on our website: HYPERLINK "http://
www.elmwood.school.nz/thinktank.htm" www.elmwood.school.nz/thinktank.htm. Enjoy
your involvement with your children's homework!
Kevin Gooch, Principal