

Homework should be purposeful

Teachers are often asked about homework and for many parents there is an expectation that there will usually be some home study set for their children. 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 a regular homework pattern. It is important to understand however that although intermediate and secondary school children can be expected to complete homework tasks independently, and this is very much needed at their level of education, 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 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.

The frequency of homework set by the teacher is often dependent on the course of study at the time. Some unit studies lend themselves to greater homework study than others and at times there are opportunities for the teacher to set 'mini' projects that can be researched from home. This is a great way to develop investigative skills particularly in aspects of science and social studies. Any concerns parents may have about the frequency should be discussed with the teacher.

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 learnings 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 that Megan Feller has added to our website:
www.elmwood.school.nz/thinktank.htm

Enjoy your involvement with your children's homework!

Kevin Gooch
Principal