



**St Columba's**  
Catholic Primary School

*God's Glory Always*

# Homework Position Paper

September, 2013

This document builds on the work of Homework practices developed at St Columba's School over a number of years. In late 2011, the school community committed to formally reviewing the school's Homework practices, resulting in the review of existing practices and consideration of contemporary research, together with professional development, focused discussion and consultation. This was led by the Homework Committee, whose members included:

Rachael Carter (Teacher)

Tamara O'Brien (Teacher)

Nicole LaRosa (Teacher)

Lisa Gibbs (Teacher)

Margo Carwardine (Assistant Principal, and Curriculum Support Teacher)

# Contents

Page 4	Definition
Page 4	Rationale / Statement of Intent
Page 4	School Homework Position Statement
Page 4	General Homework Principles, including Quality, Management and Communication
Page 6	Implementation...
Page 6	~ Responsibilities (School Leadership, Teachers Students, Parents and Caregivers)
Page 7	~ Homework and Phases of Learning
Page 8	~ Types of Homework
Page 8	Monitoring, Evaluation and Review
Page 9	References

## **Appendix**

Page 10	Appendix 1: Homework Research Scan
Page 11	Appendix 2: Homework Student's Responsibilities
Page 12	Appendix 3: Staff Homework Survey

# St Columba's School

## *Homework Position Paper*

### Definition

For the purposes of this position paper, "Homework" is defined as any task assigned by school teachers intended for students to carry out during non-school hours designed to meet particular learning aims.<sup>1</sup> (Public School NSW, 2012a)

### Rationale / Statement of Intent

Homework provides students with opportunities to reinforce and consolidate their classroom learning, develop skills and establish patterns of behaviour to develop as lifelong learners and, to some degree, involve family members in student learning. (Education Qld) (SA Government) It also provides a means of communication with parents about their child's learning and progress.

### School Homework Position Statement

Homework is an integral part of teaching and learning at St Columba's School. In acknowledging its potential value, important principles underpin its inclusion, resulting in implications in the responsibilities of all stakeholders, as well as how homework practices are enacted at different phases of schooling.

### General Homework Principles

The staff at St Columba's acknowledges the importance of referring to research on Homework (refer to Appendix 1), as well as 'best practice' and teacher accumulated 'wisdom' in developing our school's position. Within this collective body of information, we note (in making our education decisions) that research may have limitations, learning is multifaceted, and that homework is a complex process involving the interaction of a number of factors. (Vatterott, 2009)

Homework, like any instruction strategy, brings with it the hope of improving student learning. In advancing this position, St Columba's School values the following principles regarding homework and learning, which are supported by research:

**Quality...** *The quality of the homework assigned is likely to be more important than the quantity.* Assigned homework should have a specific learning purpose. When completed, teachers are called to provide both acknowledgement of student effort and feedback relating to the student's learning. (Public School NSW, 2012a)

- **Quality teaching matters** – Teacher homework behaviour is as important as student homework behaviour. Teacher attitude affects student attitude, as does the teacher's teaching style, homework habits and feedback. Positive feedback impacts positively on the effectiveness of homework. (Vatterott, 2009)
- **Skills require practice** – Students first need to learn skills in class so the teacher can ensure that they are practicing and internalising the skill correctly, *before* working independently at home. (Vatterott, 2009) (Marzano et al., 2001) (Trautwein and Koller, 2003) (Wright, 2006)
- **Children differ in readiness and developmental level** – Students differ in their level of prior knowledge, academic skills and readiness for new learning. New learning is best scaffolded into existing learning frameworks that support a learner's readiness for learning. For homework, this means differentiating tasks to meet individual student needs. (Vatterott, 2009) (Bryan and Burstein, 2004)
- **Children differ in learning styles** – Children have a profile for the way they learn best. (Dunn and Dunn, 1978) (Keefe and Jenkins, 2002) By providing choices and flexibility in homework tasks, teachers can accommodate differences in learners and therefore increase the effectiveness of homework. One example is a student choosing /designing a method they feel works best for them. (Vatterott, 2007 and 2009) (Bryan and Burstein, 2004)

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<sup>1</sup> Students will also engage in a variety of activities and have various experiences outside of school hours that will enhance their learning. Whilst these activities are to be encouraged, they are not defined as homework unless they are set by the teacher (and the teacher provides feedback to the students). (Public School NSW, 2012a)

Effective quality homework tasks are:

- ✓ purposeful, designed to meet specific learning goals
- ✓ clearly stated and requirements are made explicit during class time
- ✓ varied and challenging, but achievable (Public School NSW, 2012a)

**Management...** “Quality homework is well planned and feedback is provided by teachers to students on completion. The quality of homework needs to be manageable so that teachers can ensure quality.” (Public School NSW, 2012a)

- **Time on tasks matters** – There is a difference between the amount of time *spent on learning* and the amount of time *needed to learn*. The time *needed to learn* is influenced by aptitude, ability to understand instruction and the quality of the instruction. For assigned homework this means that some students may be about to complete activities in the recommended time, others may not. For students who need more time to learn, teachers are called to prioritise work that individual students are required to master. (Vatterott, 2009) (Trautwein and Koller, 2003) (Marzano et al., 2001) Adequate time to plan and teach effective classroom activities to support homework, as well as mark it and provide student feedback is important.
- **Task is as important as time** – The quality of the homework task is as important as the amount of time required. Quality tasks clearly relate to student learning, and are simple enough that students can complete them without help. (Vatterott, 2009)
- **Learning is individual** – Each student is unique and learns differently. Some students in some areas learn quickly, others require practice or reinforcement. Homework needs to be personalised to fit the specific needs of individual students. (Vatterott, 2009)
- **Children differ in motivation, persistence and organisational skills** – Children who have a feeling of competence about learning are more likely to do homework. Homework requires perseverance, so students with a positive self-concept or self-efficacy are more likely to persist when faced with difficult tasks. (Sagor, 2008) (Trautwein and Koller, 2003) Students who lack perseverance may also lack strategies. Families that value persistence may encourage students to keep working with their homework. Wise teachers seek feedback from students and consider how they may tap into their learning styles and interests. (Vatterott, 2009)
- **Frustration is detrimental to motivation and desire to learn** – Students have different motivation, persistence and organisation skills. As a result teachers are called to adapt homework tasks to provide opportunities for maximum success and minimum frustration for each student. Two important strategies to support this are: (1) seeing that homework is time based (with students instructed to do as much as they can in a specified time period), with feedback provided, and (2) checking for student frustration. (Vatterott, 2009)
- **Homework that is not completed does not help learning** – The challenge therefore arises for well designed homework, successfully completed by students which reinforces class learning. (Vatterott, 2009) This said, teachers are not in total control of what learning may happen at home in relation to homework. Rather, they have the power of influence and the responsibility to work with students and parents in relation to achieving homework completion.
- **Students differ in their access to resources and technology** – Teachers are called to provide flexibility and options within assigned homework activities.
- **Students live busy lives** – Consideration needs to be given to students’ other commitments, such as cultural activities, sport, outside of school tuition and home responsibilities. (Public School NSW, 2012a)

Manageability is important for students, teachers and families.

**Communication...** and the provision of clear information between teachers, parents and students is a requirement for homework to be effective.

- **Clarity is required regarding homework expectations and the completion of tasks** – It is important the students know what is required of them in completing assigned work and that parents / caregivers understand what the school's expectations are. (Public School NSW, 2012a)
- **Interactive homework provides parents or carers with strategies to support their child/ren's learning and values parent / carer contribution, enabling constructive engagement** – It is important the students understand their responsibility for initiating interaction with a 'family partner', that such interaction is carefully planned, that the parent / carer is aware of the objectives of the homework and are provided with practical strategies, that such interaction includes feedback from the student and adult, and that this feedback is reviewed to inform future activities. (Robinson, et al, 2007)
- **Guidance and assistance matters for those having difficulties completing their homework** – If parents see this as being a concern for a student, this needs to be communicated to the class teacher, as a matter of priority.

## Implementation

### RESPONSIBILITIES

#### **School Leadership**

- Develop a school homework position, in consultation with their school community, particularly the Parents and Friends' Association.
- Distribute the school homework position to staff, students, and parents and caregivers, particularly at the time of student enrolment.
- Ensure the homework position is effectively implemented throughout the school.

#### **Teachers:**

Teachers will support the General Homework Principles identified and can help students establish a routine of regular, independent study by:

- ensuring their school's homework position is implemented.
- ensuring parents and carers are aware of the school's homework position.
- demonstrating a positive attitude to homework.
- setting homework on a regular basis.
- clearly communicating the purpose, benefits and expectations of all homework.
- teaching the required skill first, before students are required to work on it at home independently.
- modelling tasks, and providing examples, as needed.
- prioritising work that individual students are required to master.
- seeing that homework is time based, with students instructed to do as much as they can in a specified time period.
- providing flexible options for students to cater for varied access to resources and technology.
- checking homework completion regularly and provide timely and useful feedback.
- seeking feedback from students about set homework tasks, including frustration levels.
- using homework that is varied, challenging, meaningful and directly related to class work and appropriate to students' learning needs, with variety in learning intelligences and learning styles. This includes differentiating tasks, as appropriate.
- explicitly teaching strategies to develop a home study routine, including organisational and time-management skills and providing opportunities to practice these strategies through homework . This includes making effective use of homework diaries in upper primary.
- giving consideration to other academic and personal development activities (school based or other) that students could be engaged in when setting homework.
- using discretion when determining tasks, taking into consideration the student's ability, home circumstances and commitments. Allowing enough time for homework is a consideration, with there being no homework set over officially designated holiday periods.
- clearly communicating to students and parents if there is a variation in homework routine or the typical structure or content focus.

- assessing homework and providing timely, positive and practical feedback and support.
- developing strategies within the school to support parents and carers becoming active partners in homework.
- discussing with parents and caregivers any developing problems concerning their child's homework and suggesting strategies to assist with their homework.

### **Students:**

Students can take responsibility for their own learning by:

- being aware of the school's homework position
- taking home everything needed to complete homework activities
- discussing with their parents or caregivers homework expectations
- accepting responsibility for the completion of homework tasks within set time frames
- following up on comments made by teachers
- seeking assistance when difficulties arise, including notifying the teacher if they are having difficulties
- organising their time to manage home obligations, and participation in physical activity and sports, recreational and cultural activities.

(Refer to Appendix 2 for a student friendly guide to these responsibilities.)

### **The role of parents and caregivers with homework**

Parents and caregivers can help their children by:

- reading to or with them, talking with them and involving them in tasks at home including shopping, playing games and physical activity
- checking if and what homework has been set
- encouraging a regular daily session to examine and complete homework
- helping them to complete tasks by discussing key questions or suggesting /directing them to resources
- encouraging them to organise their time and take responsibility for their learning
- constructively engaging with children, where strategies have been provided by the teacher
- encouraging them to read and to take an interest in and discuss current local, national and international events
- discussing their child's responses to set texts and asking to see their completed work
- discussing homework with their child in their first language, if English is not the main language spoken at home, and linking it to previous experiences
- linking homework and other learning activities to the family's culture, history and language.
- helping them to balance the amount of time spent completing homework, watching television, playing computer games, playing sport and engaging in other recreational activities
- contacting the relevant teacher to discuss any concerns about the nature of homework and their child's approach to the homework
- signing homework, when requested
- ensuring upper primary keep a homework diary
- asking how homework and class work is progressing, and acknowledging success
- attending the school events, productions or displays their child is involved in
- providing a work area (with resources e.g. pens, pencils, ruler, eraser etc.) and a supportive environment (eg free from major distractions), together with a routine that fits with the family
- supervising 'eLearning', including ICT tools and usage
- monitoring disruptions.

(Adapted from... Education Queensland, 2013, Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2013b, St Peter's Primary School, 2013)

## **HOMEWORK AND PHASES OF LEARNING**

The following is a guide in determining the amount of set homework which students might be expected to undertake. Parents may consult with a student's teacher about additional materials or practice exercises with which parents can assist their children at home.

"In the **Early Phase of Learning (Prep to Year 3)** many activities at home or in play can assist children to develop literacy, numeracy and problem-solving skills.

Homework tasks may include:

- daily reading to, with, and by parents/caregivers or other family members

- linking concepts with familiar activities such as shopping, preparation of food, local environment and family outings
- conversations about what is happening at school
- preparation for oral presentations
- opportunities to write for meaningful purposes.

In the **Prep Year**, generally students will not be set homework.

In **Years 1, 2 and 3**, set homework could be up to but generally not more than 1 hour per week.

In **Years 4 to Year 7**, some homework can be completed daily or over a weekly or fortnightly period and may:

- include daily independent reading
- be coordinated across different subject areas
- include extension of class work, projects and research.

Homework in **Year 4 and Year 5** could be up to but generally not more than 2-3 hours per week.

Homework in **Year 6 and Year 7** could be up to but generally not more than 3-4 hours per week.

While teachers may provide students with additional work relevant to their learning which the student may undertake at home, young people during this phase should generally be independent learners exercising their own judgement as to the out-of-hours time they devote to their studies. Of course, care should be taken to ensure that a balance is maintained between the various demands of study, sporting, recreational and cultural activities.”

(Education Queensland, 2013)

### TYPES OF HOMEWORK

Homework activities are many and varied, however essentially fall into three categories:

<i>Type of Homework</i>	<i>Description</i>
Practice Exercises	Provide opportunities for students to apply new knowledge or to review, revise and reinforce newly acquired skills, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ reading for pleasure</li> <li>❖ practising spelling words</li> <li>❖ practising physical education skills</li> <li>❖ writing essays and other creative tasks</li> <li>❖ practising and playing musical instruments</li> <li>❖ completing consolidation exercises for Mathematics and English</li> <li>❖ rehearsing for oral presentations</li> <li>❖ practising words/phrases learnt in a Language Other Than English.</li> </ul>
Preparatory Work	Provides opportunities for students to gain background information so they are better prepared for future lessons, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ collecting relevant materials and items, e.g. newspaper articles</li> <li>❖ researching / topics for class work</li> <li>❖ reading background material for History</li> <li>❖ reading English texts for class discussion</li> <li>❖ revising information about a current topic.</li> </ul>
Extension Assignments	Encourage students to pursue knowledge individually and imaginatively, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ writing a book review</li> <li>❖ researching local news</li> <li>❖ finding material on the Internet</li> <li>❖ making or designing an art work</li> <li>❖ monitoring advertising in a newspaper</li> <li>❖ completing Science investigation exercises</li> <li>❖ applying knowledge and skills to a new context such a a topic of interest or an authentic local issue</li> <li>❖ investigating, researching, writing, designing or making related to a topic of interest</li> </ul>

(Adapted from Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2013b))

### Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

During the course of the school year teachers will be called to review their homework practices in relation to the school’s homework position, providing information to the school leadership team for monitoring purposes. (Refer to Appendix 3, as an example.) Evaluation of the Homework Position will be on a bi-annual basis, for relevancy and effectiveness.

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### Homework Research Scan

In 2012 the NSW Department of Education and Communities invested considerable resources in conducting a *Research Scan* on Homework. It was undertaken within the context that “there are many differing views, within the educational community and beyond, about the purpose of homework, its value, and the amount of homework that should be set.”

The Research Scan concentrated on research published after 2004, “especially peer review publications and publications that included a meta-analysis and evidence based studies.”

The Research Scan notes that “the evidence base regarding the benefits or otherwise of homework is not well developed. Results to date lack coherence, are complex, and often conflicting.” In summary, the Scan notes:

- “The ‘more homework the better’ view has no research support (Cooper, H, 2001). (Homework for All – In Moderation, Educational Leadership, 58(7), cited in Queensland Government Department of Education and the Arts, 2004).
- The quality of the homework assigned is likely to be more important than the quantity (Canadian Education Association, & Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 2010).
- Homework must be purposeful and relevant to student needs and should not jeopardise the right of children to enjoy a balanced lifestyle (Dixon, 2007).
- The amount of homework and time spent on it should accord with the student’s age and developmental level (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009).
- Effort spent on homework is a stronger correlate of academic achievement than time spent on homework (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009).
- Year level appears to be a determinant of homework’s academic effectiveness (Blazer, 2009; Cooper, 1989).
- Most researchers conclude that for primary students, there is no evidence that homework lifts academic performance. There is only a small correlation between homework and achievement in middle school (Cooper, 1989; Walker, 2011). Only in the senior years of high school does homework clearly raise academic performance.”

Public School NSW (2012c)

# Homework



## Student's responsibility

It's *great* to take responsibility for my *own learning*!

- \*I know what my school and teacher expects of me.
- \*My results will be better if I take home everything I need to complete my homework.
- \*I will finish my homework tasks on time!
- \*It's great to talk to my family about my homework and ask for their support.
- \*My teacher and family are happy to answer questions or concerns I have about my homework.
- \*When I am organised I can do other activities once my homework is completed.

## My Checklist:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> All tasks completed!     | <input type="checkbox"/> Homework is in bag!              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am happy with my work. | <input type="checkbox"/> Checked and chatted to an adult! |





## Staff Homework Survey

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This survey is being completed by \_\_\_\_\_ (individual teacher)

Please attach a copy or description of this week's homework for your class / Year level. **THANK YOU.**

When providing homework opportunities for students I consistently...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
demonstrate a positive attitude to homework					
set homework on a regular basis					
clearly communicate the purpose, benefits and expectations of all homework.					
teach the required skill first, before students are required to work on it at home independently.					
model tasks, and provide examples, as needed.					
prioritise work that individual students are required to master.					
see that homework is time based, with students instructed to do as much as they can in a specified time period.					
provide flexible options for students to cater for varied access to resources and technology.					
check homework completion regularly and provide timely and useful feedback.					
seek feedback from students about set homework tasks, including frustration levels.					
use homework that is varied, challenging, meaningful and directly related to class work and appropriate to students' learning needs, with variety in learning intelligences and learning styles. This includes differentiating tasks, as appropriate.					
explicitly teach strategies to develop a home study routine, including organisational and time-management skills and providing opportunities to practice these strategies through homework. This includes making effective use of homework diaries in the upper primary.					
give consideration to other academic and personal development activities (school based or other) that students could be engaged in when setting homework.					
use discretion when determining tasks, taking into consideration the student's ability, home circumstances and commitments. Allowing enough time for homework is a consideration, with there being no homework set over holiday periods.					
clearly communicate to students and parents if there is a variation in homework routine or the typical structure or content focus.					
assess homework and provide timely, positive and practical feedback and support.					
develop strategies within the school to support parents and carers becoming active partners in homework.					
discuss with parents and caregivers any developing problems concerning their child's homework and suggesting strategies to assist with their homework.					

**Reflection / Action Required:**