Homework – a benefit not a burden

The subject of homework has always been surrounded by controversy by educators, parents and students. Horsley and Walker (2012) in their most recent book titled “Reforming Homework” state that debates over homework have been going on for much of the last century. One can find quite valid and current research that supports homework as a value-adding and pedagogically sound addition to the mainstream curriculum of the classroom (Hattie, 2008). The big question that needs to be asked is how much and what type of homework is most beneficial for our Junior School students with a particular focus on the current environment that they operate in, that is a life full of co-curricular activities.

Over the past six months members of the Junior School staff and I have been reviewing the homework guidelines for the school. We have undertaken a lot of reading of current research on best homework practice, we have surveyed the staff, and parents of children in the Junior School were also surveyed about their views on homework. Using all of the information gathered during this process we have aimed to come up with a new set of guidelines that are current and suited to the needs of our students in this time and place.

After summarising the parent survey the following conclusions could be made:

* The overwhelming majority of parents at All Saints’ College Junior School think that students from Kindergarten to Year 6 should have homework.
* The majority of parents at All Saints’ College Junior School believe that homework is a valuable part of their child’s education.
* The majority of parents at All Saints’ College Junior School believe they should provide assistance with homework.
* The majority of families at All Saints’ College Junior School have a reliable and fast internet service.
* The majority of parents at All Saints’ College Junior School feel that they do gain insights about their child’s progress by viewing their homework.

We are obviously not going to remove homework altogether from the academic programme but one of the most common and consistent comments made by parents on the survey was that the quantity of homework often caused tension at home due to the busy lives of their children and not enough time to complete it.

The main conclusions that could be made from the current research (Hattie, 2008) about homework were:

* Less is more, that is the quality of the homework is more important than the quantity.
* Homework is only of benefit to the children if the teacher values it.
* Homework must be relevant to what is happening that week in the classroom.

As a result of this review the following guidelines have been established in the Junior School for 2013.

**Time Allocation**

As a guide we recommend that students should spend the following time on homework each Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoon. This should be in addition to their daily reading.

* Infants (Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2) - 10 minutes
* Year 3 and Year 4 - 15 minutes
* Year 5 and Year 6 - 20 minutes

**Reading**

Reading at home is an essential part of a child’s literacy development. All children from Kindergarten to Year 6 are expected to read for at least 10 minutes every night of the week. This is in addition to their normal homework and should be seven nights per week. It is most beneficial for children in Kindergarten to Year 4 to read out loud to a parent or guardian.

We plan on trialling these guidelines next year and hopefully we can establish a system that provides for a more balanced approach to schoolwork and home life.

**References**
