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# Homework for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

*The Education (General Provisions) Act 2006 (Qld) was passed by the Queensland Parliament on 11 August 2006. Section 427 of the Act enables the chief executive of the Department of Education and the Arts to develop guidelines about homework for State schools.*

*In July 2006, the Homework in State Schools Policy was released. It recognises that the setting of homework must take into account the need for children to have a balanced lifestyle and should be purposeful and relevant to student needs. Guidelines are included regarding the time students at different phases of learning should allocate to homework.*

*This Research Brief examines the arguments that have been presented by education experts and others favouring or opposing homework. It then discusses the Queensland Government's review of homework in State schools, including a wide-ranging Homework Literature Review of research findings about the impact of homework on students and their families and other related matters. The Brief then considers the background to the development of the homework provision set out in the new Act and examines the recently released policy guidelines about the setting of homework in State schools.*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Homework is a topic of media, academic, parental, and community interest. While it has recently received some prominence, homework has long been a controversial issue and a source of tension.

Until recently, there was no systemic guideline for State schools regarding the setting of homework for students. Section 23 of the previous *Education (General Provisions) Regulation 2000* (Qld) provided that State school teachers may require a student to undertake homework and that school principals could decide what is a reasonable amount to be required as homework. Thus, State schools determined their own approaches to homework: **pages 1-2**.

This Research Brief considers the long-standing debate about the purpose and impact of homework. It firstly provides some **background** on how homework has been dealt with over time: **pages 2-3**. It then considers some of the main arguments **against** homework advanced by various education experts and others, followed by the case **for** homework being set for students: **pages 4-10**. Some of the main problems with the practice of setting homework are then briefly set out: **pages 10-12**.

The discussion then turns to the Queensland Government's review of the previous legislative framework governing the education of Queensland children and the release of the *Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper* in October 2004. The extent to which the issue of homework was raised for discussion in the *Consultation Paper* and the responses received to the proposals made therein are discussed on **pages 12-16**. While the Government did not propose to abolish homework, it sought feedback on concerns raised about the issue and about whether homework guidelines should be developed to assist schools, teachers and parents. In particular, the time that students at different levels of learning should devote to homework was raised as a possible feature of any such guidelines.

Integral to informing the Review on the issue of homework in State schools was the *Homework Literature Review* which looked at 64 national and international studies of homework. The matters considered were the impact of homework on students and families; the time spent on homework; environmental factors that affect homework; practices that can improve its effectiveness; and whether guidelines would be beneficial. Each is discussed and summarised in turn: **pages 16-26**.

A brief discussion of **policies** and/or **guidelines** from other Australian states and territories is provided on **pages 26-28**.

The Brief then considers section 427 of the *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006*, passed by the Queensland Parliament on 11 August 2006, that permits the chief executive of the Department of Education to make guidelines about homework in State schools and sets out the issues that may be addressed in such guidelines: **pages 28-29**. Consideration is then given to the July 2006 **Homework in State Schools Policy** which provides for each school to have a homework policy

and, among other matters, sets out a guide for determining the amount of homework students should be expected to undertake: **pages 29-31**.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Homework is a topic of media, academic, parental, and community interest. While it has recently received some prominence, homework has long been a controversial issue and a source of tension.

The [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006 \(Qld\)](#) was passed by the Queensland Parliament on 11 August 2006. The legislation was developed through extensive consultation which began with the release of the [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#) in October 2004. The Act repealed the earlier *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 (Qld)* and introduced a number of changes for State and non-State schools. Section 427 of the Act enables the chief executive of the Department of Education and the Arts (Education Department) to develop guidelines about homework for State schools.

In July 2006, the Department of Education released the [Homework in State Schools Policy](#). It recognises that the setting of homework must take into account the need for children to have a balanced lifestyle and should be purposeful and relevant to student needs. Guidelines are included regarding the time students at different phases of learning should allocate to homework. The time allocation ranges from a maximum of one hour per week for Years 1 to 3 up to a variable timeframe for students in the senior phase of learning to accord with those students' learning needs and programs.

This Research Brief examines the arguments that have been presented by education experts and others favouring or opposing the setting of homework for school students. It then discusses the Education Department's review of homework in State schools, including a wide-ranging Homework Literature Review of research findings about the impact of homework on students and their families and other related matters. The Brief then considers the background to the development of the new homework provision set out in the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006 \(Qld\)](#) and the recently released policy guidelines about the setting of homework in State schools.

## 2 PREVIOUS LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Until recently, there was no overarching systemic guideline for State schools regarding assigning homework for students. Section 23 of the [Education \(General Provisions\) Regulation 2000 \(Qld\)](#) provided that, for State schools –

- a teacher at a State school may require a student to undertake homework

- the principal of the school may decide what is a reasonable amount to be required as homework.

Under s 22 of the Regulation, a student could receive a detention for wilful neglect to prepare homework.

State school principals tended to develop a homework policy for their school based on s 23 which was communicated to parents and students.<sup>1</sup> Thus, State schools determined their own approaches to homework and what was a reasonable amount to be undertaken.

### 3 HOMEWORK – THE DEBATE

#### 3.1 SOME BACKGROUND

It appears that homework became common in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the amount assigned has waxed and waned according to political ideologies of the times. When there has been community concern about falling educational standards, the response by schools has tended to be to assign more homework.<sup>2</sup>

It has been claimed that homework reached popular status after the Soviet Union launched its artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, in 1957 causing panic among the United States and its allies and a consequent focus on science and technology in the education curricula. The desire was to ensure that American students were not left behind by their Russian counterparts who were seen to be working harder and achieving more. Homework was considered to be an integral part of the new Cold War strategy. Progressive education theories that had denounced the value of homework in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century were blamed for causing the USA to fall behind in technological and military supremacy.<sup>3</sup> This led to more homework being set and the momentum increased from there (apart from a temporary lull during the Vietnam War period).

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<sup>1</sup> Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, *Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper*, October 2004, p 21.

<sup>2</sup> M Carr-Gregg, 'Breaking the Homework Habit', *Australian Doctor*, 1 October 2004, pp 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> BP Gill & SL Schlossman, 'Villain or saviour? The American discourse on homework, 1850-2003', *Theory into Practice*, Summer 2004, at [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0NQM/is\\_3\\_43/ai\\_n7069034](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0NQM/is_3_43/ai_n7069034), citing BP Gill & SL Schlossman, 'The lost cause of homework reform', *American Journal of Education*, No 109, 2000, pp 27-62.



However, National Assessment of Educational Progress (USA) data indicates that throughout the last two decades, most students at all year levels in the USA averaged less than one hour of homework per night. Even among 17 year olds, it appeared that only 12% spent over two hours on homework each night in 1999.<sup>4</sup> In an Australian study, it was found that around 60% of students surveyed spent less than one hour per school day on mathematics and science homework and around 20% spent one to two hours on mathematics homework. Just over half spent less than an hour per school day on subjects other than mathematics and science.<sup>5</sup>

It has been reported that it is usually parents who demand that homework be set and many of them – particularly those whose children attend private schools – believe the barometer of whether a school is doing a good job is the amount of homework they set.<sup>6</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, when child health experts and the progressive education movement in the USA opposed homework believing that it affected children's physical and mental health and deprived them of important non-school learning activities and family time, most parents still appeared to support it. Indeed, some educators who attempted to abolish homework in their schools came up against serious parental opposition.<sup>7</sup>

In 1901, the state of California in the USA banned homework on the basis of it being a health risk and, even today, some USA schools still ban homework on weekends and control how much homework is given to students.<sup>8</sup>

It appears that in most schools across Australia, the average amount of homework set for students is a maximum of 30 minutes per day for students up to Year 4, increasing to around 45 to 90 minutes per day for Year 9 students. In senior years, homework can range from one to three hours per night, with a further six hours on weekends during exam periods.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> BP Gill, citing BP Gill & SL Schlossman, 'A nation at rest: The American way of homework', *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 25(3), 2003, pp 319-337.

<sup>5</sup> Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, [Homework Literature Review – Summary of key research findings](#), November 2004, p 10, citing SA Zammit, A Routitsky & L Greenwood, *Mathematics and Science Achievement of Junior Secondary Students in Australia*, Australian Council for Educational Research Ltd., Melbourne, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> M Dapin, 'Have We Done Our Homework?', *Good Weekend – Australian*, 25 February 2006, pp 32-38, p 32, citing Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, Consultant Adolescent Psychologist.

<sup>7</sup> BP Gill, citing BP Gill & SL Schlossman, 'Homework and the elusive voice of parents: Some historical perspectives', *Teachers College Record*, 105(5), 2003, pp 846-871.

<sup>8</sup> S Marionos, 'Homework: Do kids need it?', *Good Medicine*, March 2006, pp 68-71, p 68.

<sup>9</sup> S Marionos, pp 68-69.

### 3.2 HOMEWORK OPPONENTS

In October 2004, Consultant Adolescent Psychologist, Dr Michael Carr-Gregg, commented that many of his patients and parents told him that teachers assign too much homework, undermining students' participation in sport, music, drama and other activities that schools also traditionally offered.<sup>10</sup> Dr Carr-Gregg noted that research also backed up these claims with a study from the University of Michigan in the USA finding that the homework assigned to students in 1997, compared with that given in 1981, was considerably more. The researchers found that there were minimal changes in the amount given in high school but the amount assigned to 6 to 9 year olds had almost tripled to more than 120 minutes a week in 1997.<sup>11</sup>

However, in the University of Michigan study, the researchers pointed out that the main reason for the increase in studying among this 6-9 age group was an increase in the proportion that did some studying at all, from one third to more than one half. In the past, a number of children in this age group had done little or no homework. The researchers also noted that the significant increase in reading among 3 to 5 year olds probably reflects parents' increasing concern with preparing children for school. There was no evidence that 6 to 12 year olds were reading more than in 1981.<sup>12</sup> The researchers commented that while studying increased significantly between 1981 and 1997, the time spent doing so was still small – about 2 hours per week – and the increase was concentrated only among 6 to 8 year olds.<sup>13</sup>

Dr Carr-Gregg believes that there are four reasons why homework policies should be reconsidered –<sup>14</sup>

- i. homework interferes with family life which is already rushed and pressured. Parents see their children struggling over intimidating amounts of unnecessary and poorly-constructed homework which then often becomes a source of tension between time-poor parents and exhausted children. Rather than child and parent relationships being built, the family is arguing over homework. Dr Carr-Gregg said that parents often end up doing the homework themselves. He commented that time is often taken away from important activities like music and sport, and

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<sup>10</sup> M Carr-Gregg, p 33.

<sup>11</sup> M Carr-Gregg, p 33. The study referred to is SL Hofferth & JF Sandberg, *Changes in American Children's Time, 1981-1997*, University of Michigan, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> SL Hofferth & JF Sandberg, pp 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> SL Hofferth & JF Sandberg, p 34.

<sup>14</sup> The four reasons and supporting studies are set out in M Carr-Gregg, pp 33-34.

- family pursuits. In increasingly common two-income families, the time for family outings and activities is inevitably limited;
- ii. there is, according to Dr Carr-Gregg, evidence that homework has limited pedagogical value and a 1999 study led by a researcher at the University of Durham in the United Kingdom had found that there was no evidence that homework in primary schools led to increased academic performance;<sup>15</sup>
  - iii. more than half the Australian population is overweight or obese and 1.5 million of these are under 18. While Dr Carr-Gregg acknowledges that there is no guarantee that giving children less homework will increase their physical activity, the current levels of assigned homework are an obstacle to being active;
  - iv. there is, Dr Carr-Gregg believes, an equity issue where children from poorer families may not have access to computers and the Internet which may be necessary for the presentation of polished and well-researched assignments. In addition, those children may have more chores and family responsibilities than their wealthier counterparts.

In conclusion, Dr Carr-Gregg said that the way in which homework is currently constituted in primary schools was a largely ineffective and overly burdensome practice. He believed that problems caused by homework could be eased through “*structured, well-resourced after-school programs and parents suggesting structured reading time (for pleasure)...*”<sup>16</sup>

Dr Carr-Gregg recently undertook an Internet survey of 1,178 primary school students’ attitudes to homework. The survey found that 71% thought they were given too much and 57% did not believe their teachers read it when they handed it in. Further, 20% of the students reported that they often copied and pasted their homework from the Internet and 22% had their parents complete their homework for them.<sup>17</sup>

It appears that Dr Carr-Gregg has received some support from the president of the Queensland Association of State School Principals, Tony McGruther, and from the Australian Council for Educational Research.<sup>18</sup> Mr McGruther is reported to

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<sup>15</sup> The study referred to by Dr Carr-Gregg appears to be S Farrow, P Tymms & B Henderson, ‘Homework and Attainment in Primary Schools’, *British Educational Research Journal*, 25(3), 1999, pp 323-341. It studied 20,000 pupils aged 11 years old. Other studies of the link between academic achievement and homework are considered later in this Brief.

<sup>16</sup> M Carr-Gregg, p 34.

<sup>17</sup> M Dapin, p 32.

<sup>18</sup> Tony Rindfleisch & Mark Alexander, ‘The war on homework – Critics push for assignments to be banned’, *Courier Mail*, 25 July 2004, p 14.

believe in ‘real life learning’ activities, such as sporting or artistic pursuits as these “have real positive outcomes rather than doing a set task that ties up a teacher for half an hour to do the marking and stresses the parents as well”.<sup>19</sup> Sue Thomson, a Senior Research Fellow with the Australian Council for Educational Research, thinks that children “should be able to get through the curriculum at school. If not, the curriculum should be reviewed”. Dr Thomson also cited some international study findings saying that when an analysis of homework hours and achievement was made, “countries that do the most homework do not necessarily perform the best”.<sup>20</sup>

Educational commentator and former school teacher, Christopher Bantick, is even more insistent that homework is not necessary at all. Mr Bantick recently observed that homework is “a convenient babysitter.” He notes that homework is set to be done at the very time of the day when children are tired and not able to perform at their best. Moreover, the parents supervising the homework are also weary. He argues that homework “consistently erodes family life. ... This can lead to inactivity and, in time, contribute to obesity.”<sup>21</sup> Further, Mr Bantick notes the pressure that homework can place on parents, particularly single parents, whose evenings may become dominated by supervising homework. He also believes that the demands of homework may mean that students cannot keep their after school employment, meaning a loss of earnings and the experience of the real world that a job can bring.<sup>22</sup>

As noted earlier, some educators claim that homework can highlight inequities among students as poorer students may not have the same access to technology as middle and upper income students. Students from lower socio-economic families may also be restricted by the absence of a physical environment conducive to quiet reflective study and might face conflicting demands from part-time employment and family responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Such students require more support from schools.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tony Rindfleisch & Mark Alexander, quoting Tony McGruther, Queensland Association of State School Principals President.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Rindfleisch & Mark Alexander quoting Sue Thomson, Senior Research Fellow with the Australian Council for Educational Research.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher Bantick, ‘It’s time to get rid of homework’, *Courier Mail*, 16 July 2006, p 55.

<sup>22</sup> Christopher Bantick.

<sup>23</sup> E Kralovec & J Buell, ‘High stakes testing, homework and gaming the system’, *The Humanist*, 65(3), 2005, pp 17-18.

<sup>24</sup> E Kralovec & J Buell.

### 3.3 HOMEWORK ADVOCATES

On the other hand, homework has its proponents. Indeed, it has long been heralded as an effective method for reinforcing educational learning goals from primary through to tertiary levels. Some studies conducted by educators have found that there is a positive relationship between homework and higher levels of student academic achievement.<sup>25</sup>

There is evidence of an effect on students' academic achievement (as defined by school results) from homework. In an analysis of 20 studies since 1962, it was found that high schoolers aged 14 to 16 years who did homework performed 69% better than those who did not do homework but for those students aged 11 to 13 years, the average homework effect was much less. In primary school, homework appeared to have no effect on achievement.<sup>26</sup>

Confirming the above findings is more recent research published in 2006 conducted by Duke University researchers in the USA, lead by Professor Harris Cooper<sup>27</sup> which showed a positive correlation between student achievement and homework.<sup>28</sup> The researchers reviewed over 60 studies on homework between 1987 and 2003 and found that the positive correlation was much stronger for high schoolers than for primary school students.<sup>29</sup> It appears the authors believed that there were some limits on the research on homework. For example, there has been little research on whether a student's race, socio-economic status or ability affects the importance of homework on his or her achievement. The authors were reported to have suggested some reasons why older students benefit more from homework

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<sup>25</sup> J Simplicio, 'Homework in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the antiquated and ineffectual implementation of a time honoured educational strategy', *Education*, 125(1), 2005, pp 138-148, from the Gale Group CD Rom.

<sup>26</sup> J Hancock, 'Homework: A Literature Review', *Occasional Paper No 37*, College of Education & Human Development, University of Maine, p7, citing H Cooper, *The Battle Over Homework: An Administrator's Guide to Setting Sound and Effective Policies*, Thousand Oaks, California, 1994.

<sup>27</sup> Professor of Psychology at various universities in the United States. Professor Cooper has undertaken a number of studies about the effects of homework.

<sup>28</sup> Duke University News, 7 March 2006, citing a study by H Cooper, JC Robinson & E Patall, 'Does homework improve academic achievement?: A synthesis of research, 1987-2004', *Review of Educational Research*, Spring 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Duke University News, 7 March 2006, citing a study by H Cooper, JC Robinson & E Patall.

than do primary schoolers, including the fact that younger children have less effective study habits.<sup>30</sup>

There is some argument by education experts that homework should be given to all students but homework for primary schoolers should focus on non-academic benefits such as developing study habits and time management skills and encouraging learning during leisure time.<sup>31</sup> Professor Cooper is said to believe that all children should do homework but it should be suited to their development and home situation and, for younger students, it should be short and not involve too much struggle.<sup>32</sup>

A spokesperson for the Queensland Department of Education is reported to have said that homework was “*not about new learning but reinforcing, in a home setting, what students learnt at school. Homework is also important for developing lifelong study habits that will hold students in good stead when they move into tertiary study and ... work.*”<sup>33</sup> Queensland Teachers Union president, Steve Ryan, is reported to have said that homework was about consolidating what was learnt in the classroom.<sup>34</sup>

Some perceived long-term effects of homework on academic achievement and learning include an improved attitude towards school; better study habits and skills; and the encouragement of learning during leisure time. Non-academic long-term effects are said to include improved self-direction and self-discipline; better time organisation; more inquisitiveness; and enhanced independent problem solving.<sup>35</sup> There is also a view that homework can help to develop good work habits and job management skills for later in life. Some research supports this concept. For example, Year 3 students learnt that they had to start homework assignments and complete them even if there are things they would prefer to do. They also found that they needed to pace their work and do a certain amount each day to complete the task on time.<sup>36</sup> Important work habits were observed in the third-graders such

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<sup>30</sup> Duke University News, 7 March 2006, citing a study by H Cooper, JC Robinson & E Patall.

<sup>31</sup> H Cooper, ‘Homework for All – In Moderation’, *Educational Leadership*, 58(7) 2001, pp 34-38.

<sup>32</sup> Duke University News, 7 March 2006, citing a study by H Cooper, JC Robinson & E Patall.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Rindfleisch & Mark Alexander quoting a spokesperson for Education Queensland.

<sup>34</sup> Tess Livingstone, ‘Parents split on issue’, *Courier Mail*, 18 July 2006, p 4.

<sup>35</sup> H Cooper, ‘Homework Research and Policy: A Review of the Literature’, *Research/Practice* 2(2), 1994.

<sup>36</sup> L Corno, ‘Homework as the Job of Childhood’, *Theory Into Practice*, Summer 2004, [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0NQM/is\\_3\\_43/ai\\_n7576496/print](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0NQM/is_3_43/ai_n7576496/print), citing J Xu &

as focussing upon the demands of the particular assignment and self-instructing, indicating that self-discipline was being developed.<sup>37</sup>

A Melbourne based education consultant, Dr Caroline Walta, is reported to believe that homework is very important. Dr Walta is reported as saying that:

*It is the one time in a child's noisy, interactive day where he or she can relax, sit quietly and reflect. .... As early as kindergarten there needs to be time out where you can learn to be self-directed without any stimulus. The content is not as important as developing the habit.*<sup>38</sup>

However, Dr Walta is also reported to believe that students gain little from spending nights poring over work they do not understand and that new work should not be attempted at home before it is taught in class.<sup>39</sup>

The New South Wales Department of Education and Training website states that homework bridges the gap between learning at school and learning at home and it reinforces work done in class. It also helps students to build up skills such as research and time management; to improve study habits; and to develop self discipline. Homework also enables parents/carers to see how their child is progressing.<sup>40</sup> However, it is pointed out that homework has to be appropriate for each student's age and ability; must take into account students' other commitments; and must consider access to technology, such as the Internet, so that students without those resources at home are not disadvantaged.<sup>41</sup>

In a seeming show of support for homework, in July 2006, the Victorian Association of State School Principals called for parents to sign a charter that effectively contracts parents to make sure that children complete homework, respect teachers' opinions, and attend parent teacher interviews. However, the Association is reported to have said that the charter would be developed in cooperation with other principals' associations, school councils and parent

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L Corno, 'Case studies of Families Doing Third-Grade Homework', *Teachers College Record*, 100(2), 1998, pp 402-436, p 421.

<sup>37</sup> L Corno, citing J Xu & L Corno.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Davis, 'The good and bad of homework', *Australian*, 6 December 2004, p 16, quoting Dr Caroline Walta.

<sup>39</sup> Michael Davis.

<sup>40</sup> NSW Department of Education and Training, Homework webpage, at <http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/a-z/homework.php>.

<sup>41</sup> NSW Department of Education and Training, Homework webpage.

organisations.<sup>42</sup> The impetus for this charter was reported to be the belief by Victorian principals that many schools were being forced to act as de-facto parents and take on welfare and emotional wellbeing needs of students. The Association is reported as stating that there needs to be a mutual obligations contract that states the tasks and responsibilities inherent in educating children. The Association's president commented that many children arrive at school in a "*terrible state of repair*" and "*are not prepared for learning, and they are put further and further behind...*".<sup>43</sup>

It appears that parents' groups are currently divided on the homework issue. Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Association president, Wanda Lambert, is said to have noted that some parents do not want any homework set for students on the basis that it causes too many problems between children and parents; some think that a small amount is acceptable; and others want more homework to be set. The only real consensus, Mrs Lambert is reported to have found, is that homework should not interfere with family life.<sup>44</sup>

It seems that a number of educational experts believe that schools need to broaden the concept of what constitutes homework from the traditional pen-to-paper exercises. For instance, a game of scrabble with parents might be relevant learning for a Year 3 student.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.4 SOME PROBLEMS IN PRACTICE

Irrespective of what side of the debate predominates, there appears to be a number of inherent problems with the actual practice of assigning homework to students. These issues emerge from USA studies but it is possible that some of the same problems arise in Australian schools.<sup>46</sup>

The first problem identified by researchers from the University of Michigan was inconsistency in setting homework, with some teachers giving little or no homework and others giving a great deal of it. The study found that primary

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<sup>42</sup> Chee Chee Leung, 'Principals call for parents' charter', *Age Online*, 10 July 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Chee Chee Leung.

<sup>44</sup> Tess Livingstone, citing Ms Wanda Lambert.

<sup>45</sup> S Marinos, p 70.

<sup>46</sup> The problems found in US schools with the setting of homework are set out in J Simplicio.



school students received more homework than secondary school students.<sup>47</sup> While it could be that students at this younger age may be performing more drill-based tasks in order to build basic learning skills, this can result in tedious and boring assignments that make students lose interest.<sup>48</sup>

There is a related issue that one student being taught by a number of subject-specific teachers may receive a lot of homework because of a lack of coordination between the teachers. It has been suggested that what might be of more benefit for students are assignments that are multi-discipline in nature and work to reinforce at home what is being taught in class.<sup>49</sup>

Inconsistencies between school systems were also identified, with some US school districts setting few or no guidelines for teachers about giving homework while others establish firm policies on homework and set minimum and maximum time guidelines.<sup>50</sup>

Lack of consistency of the above types may result in students not learning viable strategies for successful completion of homework nor developing consistent learning patterns.<sup>51</sup>

A second problem that has been recognised is that many homework tasks do not accomplish the educational goals they aim to achieve. For instance, if maths problems of a similar type are set as homework, for those students who have understood how to solve the problems from the teaching in class, the problems reinforce the skills learnt. However, for those students who did not comprehend the basics, the problems will not provide an effective teaching tool, especially if there are a number of the same type. This can result in frustration for the student.<sup>52</sup>

Another problem can occur if teachers mark homework only on the basis of whether it is completed or not rather than on the quality of the work itself. If this is the case, then students soon learn that handing in a badly done homework

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<sup>47</sup> J Simplicio, citing S Hofferth & J Sanberg, *Changes in America's Children's Time 1981-1997*.

<sup>48</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>49</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>50</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>51</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>52</sup> J Simplicio.

assignment is better than not handing in one at all. This can lessen the value of homework to students.<sup>53</sup>

Turning to Australia, it was recently reported that some Sydney schools are warning parents not to do their children's homework. There is a view that parents who contribute to a child's homework may allow the child to develop a false sense of the worth of their homework where the child might think they have done the work and achieved at a high level but, in fact, the parents have had a fair amount of input.<sup>54</sup> Professor Matt Sanders, at the University of Queensland is reported to have said that rather than parents doing the child's homework, it is more beneficial in the long run to give the child tips and clues, not answers, and to help them develop research skills.

#### 4 EDUCATION LAWS FOR THE FUTURE

The [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 1989 \(Qld\)](#) (the previous Act) and the [Education \(General Provisions\) Regulation 2000 \(Qld\)](#) (the previous Regulation) formerly established the broad legislative framework for the education of Queensland children. The legislation covered a number of matters including the powers of the Minister for Education and of those involved in education management, and imposed obligations on parents to ensure that their child enrolls at, and attends, school.<sup>55</sup>

In 2004, the Queensland Government began a comprehensive review of the previous Act aimed at developing new legislation that would carry education in Queensland into the future and provide Queensland children and young people with quality learning. Together with the need to ensure that the legislation reflected contemporary needs and expectations, the Department of Education and the Arts (the Department) proposed to amalgamate the previous Act with the [Youth Participation in Education and Training Act 2003 \(Qld\)](#) – the 'earn or learn' reforms which commenced in 2006. A new legislative framework was required to support a range of other recent Government initiatives, including the introduction of a new preparatory year from 2007, and raising the compulsory school starting age from 2008.

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<sup>53</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>54</sup> Adele Horin & Anna Patty, 'Stop doing homework, overzealous parents warned', *SMH Online*, 23 September 2006, referring to observations of Professor Matt Sanders, Professor of Clinical Psychology at the University of Queensland.

<sup>55</sup> Queensland Department of Education, [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 4.

The [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#) was released in October 2004. A young persons' guide to the *Consultation Paper* was also distributed to around 1,000 young people and youth workers. Several issues relating to both State and non-State schools were raised in the *Consultation Paper* and extensive consultation followed during 2004 and early 2005, including a number of meetings with key stakeholders. Comments arising from the consultation process were used to inform policy development.<sup>56</sup>

Around 2,200 responses were received through forums and written feedback, including 24 written submissions from key stakeholders.<sup>57</sup>

An Exposure Draft Bill was released in December 2005, together with an [Explanatory Document](#), and comments were invited up until 17 March 2006. The process culminated in the passage of the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006](#) on 11 August 2006.

One issue of considerable interest during the review process was that of homework.

When the Legislative Review was announced, the Premier, the Hon Peter Beattie MP, indicated that the Government would not “get rid of homework” but that the Department would consider the homework issue and whether guidelines need to be developed to provide better direction for schools, teachers and parents. He noted that some parents had concerns about the level of homework some children are doing.<sup>58</sup> Mr Beattie said that:

*The review is about finding the right balance – between family life and helping students reach their full potential through reinforcing lessons learnt during the school day. ...*

*This is all at the same time as ensuring student literacy and numeracy standards are not only maintained but improved.*

*The Department will review current research in this area and examine what is an appropriate level of homework and its impact on the educational achievement of students.<sup>59</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 2.

<sup>57</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 2.

<sup>58</sup> Hon Peter Beattie MP, Premier and Minister for Trade, ‘Beattie Pencils in Homework Review’, *Queensland Media Statement*, 1 August 2004.

<sup>59</sup> Hon Peter Beattie MP, ‘Beattie Pencils in Homework Review’.

#### 4.1 EDUCATION REFORMS FOR THE FUTURE CONSULTATION PAPER

The [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper \(Consultation Paper\)](#) was released by the Queensland Government in October 2004. Widespread consultation followed, including meetings with school communities, peak organisations and government departments. Among the many issues to arise was that of the place and level of homework. The [Consultation Paper](#) noted that modern legislation needed to take account of choices available to families and students and to reflect a balance that ensures that students' educational futures are enhanced. It also recognised that many parents now work and have less opportunity to involve themselves in their children's homework and that an increasing number of older students have part-time work.<sup>60</sup>

The [Consultation Paper](#) noted that the Review undertook national and international research on homework best practice (the [Homework Literature Review – Summary of key research findings](#)) regarding matters such as the effects on student achievement; effects on families; suggested time allocations; practices to improve homework effectiveness; and existing guidelines to assist in the development of homework policies.<sup>61</sup>

The Reviewers found that there were consistent findings from the [Homework Literature Review](#) on a number of areas. For example, it was found that time on homework spent by families meant less time (which was already scarce in many families) on leisure and other family activities. It was also found that more positive homework outcomes were based on teacher preparation and planning, setting of tasks appropriate to the ability and motivation of students, and the support available from parents. Interestingly, it was a consistent finding that some homework was better than too much or none at all. It was also observed that the time to be devoted to homework should recognise each student's age and development and may need to reflect differing expectations across early, middle and senior learning phases. Another outcome was that homework should be linked to class activities so it formed part of the learning process across home and school.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of feedback to the [Consultation Paper](#), a majority (over 80%) of respondents at community and principals' sessions were in favour of departmental guidance on acceptable homework practices while still enabling schools to have

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<sup>60</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22.

<sup>61</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22. The [Homework Literature Review – Summary of key research findings](#) is explored in more detail later in this Brief.

<sup>62</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22.

individual freedom to determine their own policies. A minority of parents supported no homework at all, or only homework that related directly to students' projects. One of the major parental complaints was that homework was not marked and they consequently felt there was no feedback on their children's performance.<sup>63</sup>

Given that another consistent finding of the [Homework Literature Review](#) was that guidelines to support schools in developing homework policies were available in other national and international education systems,<sup>64</sup> the [Consultation Paper](#) proposed that the chief executive of Education would be able to develop such guidelines for State schools. The guidelines would be based on a partnership with schools, parents, teachers and students and address matters such as the purpose of homework; approaches to homework appropriate for each learning phase; setting of tasks appropriate to students' abilities; recommended time allocations; responsibilities of schools, parents, teachers and students; tips and support materials; and the evaluation and monitoring of policies.<sup>65</sup>

Accordingly, the [Consultation Paper](#) raised for discussion whether such guidelines would be helpful for schools, parents, teachers and students; whether further matters should be addressed in them; and whether wilful neglect of completion of homework should continue to be a breach of school discipline.<sup>66</sup>

Of those respondents who provided written feedback, 88% supported the development of homework guidelines by the chief executive, with 75% supporting the elements to be included in the guidelines.<sup>67</sup> Many respondents felt that there should be a consistency in standards and expectations across schools and comments were also made about the need to update guidelines on a regular basis to reflect changing needs. A number of comments were received about the elements to be contained in guidelines. Examples of such were that homework should be negotiated on an individual basis for each student and family situation and that each student's ability to absorb data should be considered. There was some observation that adequate time to do the homework should be given to students and some respondents commented that weekends were for family activities, not homework. It was also pointed out that the guidelines should take into account the fact that not all students have access to a computer or the Internet at home which

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<sup>63</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 11.

<sup>64</sup> As well as support materials or tips.

<sup>65</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22.

<sup>66</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22.

<sup>67</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 11.

facilitates completion of homework. Comments were also received about the need for homework to reflect class work.<sup>68</sup>

Most respondents believed that wilful neglect of homework should continue to be a breach of school discipline that may result in detention.<sup>69</sup>

A small number of respondents (12%) did not agree with the proposal to develop guidelines but many comments related primarily to the issue about whether there should be homework given at all. Those respondents whose opposition related specifically to the development of guidelines made comments including –

- that guidelines are for the school to develop together with parents;
- that teachers know best and can convey their requirements to parents and students;
- that State schools would be subject to guidelines while non-State schools were not; and
- that meaningful guidelines were too hard to create.<sup>70</sup>

A further Review proposal was to give representative school bodies (e.g. Parents & Citizens Associations) a key role in assisting schools to develop practical and effective approaches to homework. Thus, it was raised for discussion whether such bodies should be involved in developing policies at their school.<sup>71</sup> Written feedback indicated that 77% of respondents supported representative bodies having involvement in developing homework policies.<sup>72</sup>

## 4.2 THE HOMEWORK LITERATURE REVIEW

As noted earlier, in conjunction with the [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), a review of 64 national and international studies on homework (predominantly from the United Kingdom and the United States) was undertaken and a summary of results presented in the [Homework Literature Review – Summary](#)

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<sup>68</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 11.

<sup>69</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 11.

<sup>70</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 12.

<sup>71</sup> [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), p 22.

<sup>72</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 11.

[of key research findings](#).<sup>73</sup> It was envisaged that the findings would inform consultation with parents, students and teachers regarding the future of homework in Queensland State schools through the [Consultation Paper](#).<sup>74</sup> The purpose of the Review was to identify evidence of the impact of homework on students and families; the time spent on homework; environmental factors that affect homework; practices that can improve its effectiveness; and whether homework guidelines would be beneficial. The findings relevant to each aspect are discussed below.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.2.1 Impact of Homework on Students

This Brief has already considered research which tends to indicate some positive correlation between student achievement and homework – at least among secondary school students.

The [Homework Literature Review – Summary of key research findings](#) (the Review) considered 14 publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications to inform the issue of the impact of homework on students.

The Review noted that researchers have not conclusively agreed on whether homework is, indeed, effective in improving student achievement. It cited a 2001 quantitative review of research using three different research designs done in the USA.<sup>76</sup> That review found that students who did homework generally outperformed those who did not do homework. It also found a low association between the amount of homework young students do and their subsequent achievement.<sup>77</sup>

The Review also said that there is evidence to suggest that –

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<sup>73</sup> Queensland Department of Education and the Arts, [Homework Literature Review – Summary of key research findings](#), November 2004. The review considered literature published post 1994 and focused on peer-reviewed publications and those that included a meta-analysis (averaging the effect of treatment across studies of different quality to give a more accurate result) and evidence-based studies in terms of design and methodology (p 6).

<sup>74</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 6.

<sup>75</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 3.

<sup>76</sup> This study was H Cooper & JC Valentine, ‘Using Research to Answer Practical Questions About Homework’, *Educational Psychologist*, 36(3), 2001, pp 143-153.

<sup>77</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 8, citing H Cooper & JC Valentine.

- moderate amounts of time spent on homework is related to higher achievement (i.e. higher subject test scores) although too much or too little time spent on it was less productive;<sup>78</sup>
- there appears to be an adverse effect on academic achievement where no homework is done or it is poorly done. A positive effect on academic performance through the accurate completion of homework is related to parental involvement, peer cooperation, self monitoring and graphing, ‘real life’ tasks, and collaborative problem solving.<sup>79</sup>

Research evidence regarding the **benefits** of homework includes the following –<sup>80</sup>

- homework can impact positively on the retention and understanding of knowledge, can improve study skills, attitudes toward school, and demonstrate that learning can take place outside the classroom;<sup>81</sup>
- students’ writing scores, literacy outcomes and attitudes can improve when students engage in ‘interactive homework’ with the family;<sup>82</sup>
- students identify homework with making them ‘smarter’ and 78% of those surveyed enjoyed their homework.<sup>83</sup>

Contrasting research evidence of **limitations** and **negative impacts** includes –<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 8, citing W Keys, S Harris & C Fernandes, *Third International Mathematics and Science Study, Second National Report, Part 2: Patterns of Mathematics and Science Teaching in Upper Primary Schools in England and Eight Other Counties*, UK National Foundation for Educational Research, 1997.

<sup>79</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 8, citing T Bryan, K Burstein & J Bryan, ‘Students with Learning Disabilities: Homework Problems and Promising Practices’, *Educational Psychologist* 36(3), 2001, pp 167-180.

<sup>80</sup> See [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7 for all the findings on this outcome.

<sup>81</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing L Corno, ‘Looking at homework differently’, *Elementary School Journal*, 100, 2000, pp 529-548.

<sup>82</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing J Epstein, BS Simon & KC Salinas, *Involving Parents in Homework in the Middle Grades*, Research Bulletin No 18, John Hopkins University, Centre for Evaluation, Development and Research, 1997.

<sup>83</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing C O’Rourke-Ferrara, *Did You Complete All Your Homework Tonight, Dear?*, New York: Elementary and Early Childhood Education Clearinghouse, 1998.

<sup>84</sup> See [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7 for all the findings on this outcome.



- homework may cause a student to become bored with school if it doesn't engage him or her in meaningful learning;<sup>85</sup>
- homework may contribute to existing inequities as it appears that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to complete it – possibly because of outside employment or the lack of a physical environment conducive to undertaking homework;<sup>86</sup>
- homework alone is unlikely to ensure that students, families and schools will share and meet learning goals.<sup>87</sup>

From the above, the Review concluded that the findings on the impact of homework on students were mixed, with both positive and negative effects found. The Review noted that the research findings indicate that students who complete homework generally outperform students who do not on some measures of academic achievement but too much homework can impact badly on students' achievement and their access to leisure activities that are also important for life skills. There is, however, little research on the impact of homework on obesity, sleep, stress, and independence of students.<sup>88</sup>

#### **4.2.2 Impact of Homework on Families**

A review of 16 publications was undertaken to inform the issue of the impact of direct parental participation in homework and the effect on family life.

Summarising the various research evidence, the Review noted that it appears overall that parental involvement in homework is beneficial to students and positive involvement in homework is associated with higher levels of student achievement.<sup>89</sup>

The Review noted research evidence which includes the following –<sup>90</sup>

- positive parental involvement in homework has been found to be a strong predictor of student achievement;<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing H Cooper, 'Homework for All – In Moderation'.

<sup>86</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing H Cooper & JC Valentine.

<sup>87</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 7, citing J Epstein, BS Simon & KC Salinas.

<sup>88</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 8.

<sup>89</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9, having referred to a number of studies concerning students' writing scores and reading ability.

<sup>90</sup> See [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9 for the full range of evidence.

- parents of younger children are more involved in their children's homework;<sup>92</sup>
- parents of primary school students in the USA regard homework as normal and believe that success at homework is necessary for success at school and report that they feel obliged to be involved in their children's homework.<sup>93</sup>

However, there can be some drawbacks with parental involvement in homework. For instance, parents may become over-involved in homework, use a different way of teaching to that of the teacher (causing conflict with children) and may feel pressured to support a homework agenda they may feel they have little power to change.<sup>94</sup>

Some negative impacts of homework on families can be its intrusion on the lives of families and family time available for leisure.<sup>95</sup>

### 4.2.3 Time on Homework

The Review considered 18 publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications to inform it about the relationship between time spent on homework and academic achievement, noting that modern families are 'time poor' and time on homework leaves less time for other family activities.<sup>96</sup>

Among the studies considered was that of the US Department of Education which conducted a study of students aged 9, 13 and 17 years to ascertain the amount of time they spent on homework in 1984 compared with 1999. It was found that 5%

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<sup>91</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 8, citing H Cooper, K Jackson, B Nye & J Lindsay, 'A Model of Homework's Influence on the Performance Evaluations of Elementary School Students', *Journal of Experimental Education*, 69(2), 2001, pp 143-154.

<sup>92</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9, citing H Cooper, J Lindsay & B Nye, 'Homework in the home: How student, family and parenting style differences relate to the homework process', *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 225(4), 2000, pp 464-487.

<sup>93</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9, citing C O'Rourke-Ferrara.

<sup>94</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9, citing H Cooper, 'Homework for All – In Moderation' and Y Solomon, J Warin, C Lewis, 'Helping with Homework? Homework as a Site of Tension for Parents and Teenagers', *British Educational Research Journal*, 28(4), 2002, pp 603-623.

<sup>95</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 9, citing E Kralovec & J Buell, 'End Homework Now', *Educational Leadership*, 58(7), 2001, pp 39-42.

<sup>96</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 10.

of 9 year olds, 8% of 13 year olds and 12% of 17 year olds reported that they completed over 2 hours of homework each night.<sup>97</sup>

The Review also looked at an international comparative study by Australian researchers which found little change to maths and science scores in relation to the amount of time spent on homework.<sup>98</sup> The study found that approximately 60% of Australian students surveyed said they spent less than one hour per school day on mathematics and science homework while just over half the students spent less than an hour on homework for other subjects. Around 20% reported that they spent one to two hours on mathematics homework and fewer students spent this amount of time on science or other subjects.<sup>99</sup>

The Review observed that the research literature indicated mixed results when examining the relationship between the amount of time spent on homework and student outcomes.<sup>100</sup> As explained earlier, in Professor Harris Cooper's analysis of 20 studies since 1962, it was found that high schoolers aged 14 to 16 years who did homework performed 69% better than those who did not do homework but for those students aged 11 to 13 years, the average homework effect was much less. Indeed, in primary school, homework appeared to have no effect on achievement.<sup>101</sup>

It was also noted that research supported the idea that the amount of homework and time spent on it should recognise the effect of a student's age and development. For example, an increase in the amount of time devoted to homework in the early childhood years is found to relate to lower achievement but, in the middle and high school years, more time spent on homework coincided with higher achievement. For high school students, the completion of at least one hour of homework per week was positively related to achievement (which positive relationship still occurred when less homework was completed) but was not entirely evident when

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<sup>97</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 10, citing US Department of Education, *National Assessment of Educational Progress: 1984 and 1999 Long-Term Trend Assessment (Indicator No 22)*, US National Centre for Education Statistics, 2001.

<sup>98</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 10, citing SA Zammit et al.

<sup>99</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 10, citing SA Zammit, et al.

<sup>100</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 10.

<sup>101</sup> J Hancock, p 7, citing H Cooper, *The Battle Over Homework: An Administrator's Guide to Setting Sound and Effective Policies*. As noted earlier, a recent 2006 study confirms these findings.

students reported doing more than two hours of homework each night.<sup>102</sup> The Review believed that such research shows that ‘a more homework the better’ view should not be the basis for policy and practice. There appears to be a point of diminishing returns.<sup>103</sup>

The Review cited some case studies from the UK and the USA that suggest that Year 1 students should do no more than 10 minutes of homework per day with the amount increasing by up to 10 minutes per day for each year level up to a maximum of 2 hours per day in Year 12.<sup>104</sup> The UK Department of Education and Skills recommends the following times to be devoted to homework for each year of schooling –

- Years 1-2 – up to 12 mins per day
- Years 3-4 – up to 18 mins per day
- Years 5-6 – 30 mins per day
- Years 7-8 – between 45 and 90 mins per day
- Year 9 – 1 to 2 hours per day
- Years 10-11 – up to 2 hours per day
- Years 12-13 – dependent upon individual programs and school policy.

These UK guidelines, which were reproduced in the [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), elicited a mixed response during the consultation process.<sup>105</sup>

The Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training’s 2001 *Homework Habits: Homework Guidelines* suggest –

- Early Years (Prep-Year 4) – not more than 30 mins per day and not on weekends or vacations
- Middle Years (Years 5-9) – 30-45 mins per day in Year 5 to 45-90 mins per day in Year 9

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<sup>102</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), pp 10-11, citing H Cooper, ‘Homework for All – In Moderation’.

<sup>103</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 11.

<sup>104</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 11, citing H Cooper, ‘Homework for All – In Moderation’ and other UK and USA case studies.

<sup>105</sup> [Education Laws for the Future - Overview of Consultation](#), p 12.

- Later Years (Years 10-12) – 1-3 hours per night a week and up to 6 hours on weekends during the school term.<sup>106</sup>

#### 4.2.4 Homework Environment

The Review considered nine publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications to inform its views about the homework environment.

There is considerable research about environmental factors relating to homework. For example, academic success has been associated with safe, calm and quiet home environments in which parents interact with children. Other positive impacts are associated with material resources; psychological resources (e.g. parental support and home ‘culture’ of supporting achievement) and behavioural resources (e.g. parental involvement).<sup>107</sup>

The Review noted that some studies, including an Australian study, had identified educational benefits being gained through homework environments outside of the home such as homework clubs and centres which offer access to learning resources (e.g. computers) and a social environment conducive to study. In the Australian study, the homework clubs considered were ones where students could be tutored by teachers resulting in higher assignment and homework completion rates.<sup>108</sup>

In another US study, not considered by the Review but mentioned earlier in this Brief,<sup>109</sup> it was suggested that another possible solution was for schools to set aside some time before the end of the school day to coordinate and supervise homework at school, with teachers available to provide assistance. This could result in homework that is completed and completed properly and enable teachers to assess the skill levels of individual students. Students may also gain a better understanding of the material though working closely with the teachers. It may also challenge teachers to develop teaching strategies to cater to the needs of

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<sup>106</sup> See [Homework Literature Review](#), p 15.

<sup>107</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 12, citing M Martini ‘Features of home environment associated with children’s school success’, *Early Child Development and Care*, 1995, pp 49-68 and NK Bowen & GL Bowen, ‘The mediating role of educational meaning in the relationship between home academic culture and academic performance’, *Family Reunions*, 47(1), 1998, pp 45-51.

<sup>108</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 12, citing studies including A Luke et al, *Beyond the Middle: a report about literacy and numeracy development of target group students in the middle years of schooling Appendices Volume 2*, Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training, Canberra, 2003.

<sup>109</sup> J Simplicio.

different students. It has been argued that by setting aside a fixed amount of time at the end of each school day for completing homework, schools will be better able to guarantee that educational goals are met as well as relieving time pressures on students and their families outside of school.<sup>110</sup>

#### **4.2.5 Practices that Improve Effectiveness**

Sixteen publications from peer-reviewed academic journals and academic publications informed the Review regarding what practices improve the effectiveness of homework.

The Review noted that research evidence showed that practices which improved homework effectiveness included encouraging parental involvement in homework; interactive homework activities involving students in sharing examples of writing with their family; and designing homework to build on skills, encourage creative thinking and to cater for students' special needs (e.g. learning difficulties, family problems).<sup>111</sup> Whole of school practices to improve homework effectiveness include those such as communication and collaboration with parents; collaborative planning with parents to develop homework policies and guidelines; and 'real life' assignments.<sup>112</sup>

#### **4.2.6 Scan of Homework Policies and Guidelines in Australia and Overseas**

The Review noted that, in Queensland, some schools had used the then s 23 of the previous Regulation to develop individual homework policies in consultation with the school community. At the time of reporting, there was no systemic guideline for schools. However, the Review noted, other Australian states and territories have more specific policies and guidelines.<sup>113</sup> For instance, the Victorian Department of Education guidelines set out principles, types of homework, successful practice in each phase of schooling, associated time allocations for homework and guidance for parents.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> J Simplicio.

<sup>111</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 13, citing a number of studies.

<sup>112</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 13, citing a number of studies.

<sup>113</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 14.

<sup>114</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), pp 14-15.

The Review said that a search of international information reveals a variety of ways that legislation and policy provide guidance to schools on homework, including policies from local education boards and individual schools.<sup>115</sup>

The Review particularly noted the UK Department of Education and Skills' *Homework: Guidelines for Primary and Secondary Schools* (1998) and the US Department of Education's *Helping Your Child with Homework: For Parents of Children in Elementary Through Middle School* (2002). Specific features of note include –<sup>116</sup>

- a definition of homework (UK);
- the concept that homework is a partnership with parents (UK) and an outline of parental responsibility (UK and USA);
- guidelines to support schools to establish a whole of school homework policy (UK);
- maximum time allocations across all year levels (UK and USA);
- supporting materials and tips to assist parents, teachers and students (e.g. leaflets, tips on how to help with homework) (UK and USA).

#### **4.2.7 Conclusions**

From the above scan and review of the key findings, the Review concluded that –

- some homework seems to be better than too much or none at all;
- time spent on homework needs to respond to the age and development of the student;
- given that there appears to be a point of diminishing returns regarding time on homework, many policies in other jurisdictions specify a maximum amount of time to be spent on homework rather than 'the more homework the better' approach which should not be a basis for policy and practice;
- parents can influence the homework environment by creating positive conditions for learning and by encouraging their children to complete their homework;

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<sup>115</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 15.

<sup>116</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 15.

- successful homework outcomes appear to be contingent on teacher preparation and the setting of 'real life' tasks, the motivation of students, and the level of parental support;
- national and international best practice identifies that developing homework policies provides the chance for schools to respond to and build on the perspectives, contributions and experiences of students and the school community;
- homework activities seem to be more effective when linked directly to class activities so that homework is part of the whole learning process;
- guidelines to support schools in developing those policies are available in the education systems of other jurisdictions and may be of benefit to Queensland State schools.<sup>117</sup>

### 4.3 POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

As noted earlier, a number of Australian jurisdictions have policies and/or guidelines about the setting of homework. Only Victoria appears to have guidelines that set out the time that should be allocated to homework.

The **Victorian** Department of Education guidelines recommend that from Prep to Year 4, homework should not exceed 30 minutes each school day and should not be set on weekends or holidays. In the middle years of school it should engage students for around 30-45 minutes per school day and up to 90 minutes a day in Year 9. Senior high school students should be given 1-3 hours of homework per school night and up to 6 hours on weekends during exam times. However, it has been claimed that the Department has no research to show how individual schools interpret and implement the guidelines and schools may each have different ideas on how to construe them.<sup>118</sup>

For example, it has been reported that one Victorian school asked nothing more from its Year 1 to 5 students other than taking a book home to be shared with the family whereas another school expected Year 3 students to work on three projects a term involving research, writing and presentation, as well as weekly spelling lists and a fortnightly maths sheet. In the latter school, students were kept in at lunchtime if they failed to complete the maths sheet on time. It was claimed that,

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<sup>117</sup> [Homework Literature Review](#), p 16.

<sup>118</sup> M Simons, 'Home Invasion', *AgeOnline*, 4 February 2005.



in each case, the school believed they were actually following the Department's guidelines.<sup>119</sup>

In brief, policies and guidelines of some other states and territories are as follows –

- **South Australia:** *Student Homework*, Memo to all Principals.<sup>120</sup> Teachers may require that homework appropriate to the age and ability of the child shall be undertaken by the child;
- **New South Wales:** *Homework Policy* (August 2000) supported by a Memorandum to Principals. It explains the purpose of homework, types of homework such as preparatory and extension assignments, and expectations of parents, students and teachers;
- **Australian Capital Territory:** *Parent Participation in Schools* (May 2004) contains an explanation about the benefits of homework and presents homework as a means of parental participation;
- **Western Australia:** *How Can I Help with Homework?* provides a practical guide to parents through a list of Frequently Asked Questions such as how parents can help and what to do if parents have a concern.

A major benefit of homework, it would appear, is its potential to provide educational advantages. However, to achieve such benefits it must have a clear purpose and require students to use a range of skills while challenging and motivating them to complete the project.<sup>121</sup>

Senior lecturer in Educational Studies at the Sydney University of Technology, Kathie Forster, has suggested some ways of ensuring that homework delivers educational benefits for students and forms a link between parents and the school.<sup>122</sup> These include –

- schools having homework policies which are developed collaboratively by teachers, students and parents and, once developed, have the support of all parties. These policies should contain measures to assist all parties to get the most from homework including, for example, homework centres or homework hotlines. Homework diaries for younger students to be signed by parents could

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<sup>119</sup> M Simons.

<sup>120</sup> The relevant legislation is *Education Regulation 1997*, reg 64.

<sup>121</sup> K Forster, 'Homework: A bridge too far?', *Issues in Educational Research*, 10(1), 2000, pp 21-37, <http://www.iier.org.au/iier10/forster.html>.

<sup>122</sup> K Forster.

be a means of allowing parents to see what projects their child was being asked to do and of forming a line of communication with the teacher;

- teachers improving homework practices such as ensuring that they effectively communicate with parents about the purpose that they wish homework to achieve and the type of support they would like parents to provide;
- teachers providing a variety of homework to suit the range of educational purposes that homework should serve and to increase student interest in their homework. These homework tasks should be compatible with the approaches to teaching and learning employed in the classroom and should avoid being set on the assumption that ‘the more homework the better’;
- teachers providing for greater flexibility in homework to take account of the diversity of lifestyles, needs and interests of their students. An example would be to set a compulsory core of homework each week with a number of options from which students could choose. This would give students the opportunity to organise their time and to develop study skills; and
- teachers providing prompt and meaningful feedback on students’ work.<sup>123</sup>

## 5 DEVELOPMENT OF LEGISLATION

Following the consultation process on the [Education Reforms for the Future Consultation Paper](#), an Exposure Draft Education (General Provisions) Bill was released in December 2005, together with an [Explanatory Document](#). Comments were invited on the proposals. The draft Bill included a provision that permitted the chief executive of the Department of Education to make guidelines about homework in State schools.

Section 427 of the [Education \(General Provisions\) Act 2006](#)<sup>124</sup> picks up that proposal. The issues that may be addressed by a guideline (which must be made available to each State school principal) include the following –

- the purpose of homework;
- homework approaches appropriate to each stage of learning at a State school;
- the setting of homework tasks for a student appropriate to the student’s ability;

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<sup>123</sup> K Forster.

<sup>124</sup> The Act was passed by the Queensland Parliament on 11 August 2006. It is supported by the [Education \(General Provisions\) Regulation 2006 \(Qld\)](#), tabled on 11 October 2006.

- the recommended amount of time a student should be expected to spend on homework;
- the responsibilities of teachers, parents and students in relation to homework; and
- the development and implementation of a homework policy by a State school's principal.

The [Explanatory Notes](#) point out that, while not strictly necessary, the power and the guidelines are aimed at providing a consistent standard of homework practices across the State school sector.<sup>125</sup>

Wilful neglect of homework continues to be a ground for detention under s 283(2) of the new Act.

## 6 NEW HOMEWORK IN STATE SCHOOLS POLICY

In July 2006, the Queensland Department of Education and the Arts released the [Homework in State Schools Policy](#). The summary document states –

*Homework provides students with opportunities to consolidate their classroom learning, pattern behaviour for lifelong learning beyond the classroom and involve family members in their learning. The setting of homework takes into account the need for students to have a balanced lifestyle. This includes sufficient time for family, recreation, cultural pursuits and employment where appropriate.*

Each school will have a homework policy which is developed by the principal in consultation with the school community (particularly the Parents and Citizens' Association). The summary document indicates that the principal should provide the school homework policy to staff, students, parents and carers, particularly when the student enrolls at the school, with updates as necessary.

The homework policy is intended to enhance student learning and encourage independent study but enables students to balance their homework with their other commitments to recreational, family, employment and cultural activities. When announcing the policy, the Queensland Premier, the Hon Peter Beattie MP, commented that the “*key is balance and while homework is important for students, so too are the other healthy activities that young people need to undertake*”.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Education (General Provisions) Bill 2006 (Qld), [Explanatory Notes](#), p 215.

<sup>126</sup> Hon Rod Welford MP, Minister for Education and the Arts, ‘Homework Guidelines Recommend Balance’, *Queensland Media Statement*, 18 July 2006.

In addition to setting out principals' responsibilities, the document then describes responsibilities of teachers and students and parents/carers. For example, teachers should help students establish a routine of regular independent study through measures such as setting homework on a regular basis, checking it and providing timely and useful feedback. Teachers are also asked to communicate the purposes, benefits and expectations of homework and set homework that is varied, challenging and related to class work and learning needs. They can also teach strategies to develop time management and organisational skills which can be practised through homework. Teachers should be ready to discuss with parents/carers any problems that may develop regarding homework issues. The policy also recognises that students' other commitments outside of school, such as sporting activities, should be taken into account when setting homework.

The other side of the equation is that students should take responsibility for their own learning in various ways such as being aware of the school homework policy; accepting responsibility for completing their homework in a timely way; following up on teachers' feedback on their homework; and organising their time to balance home obligations, sporting, cultural and recreational activities and part-time employment. Parents/carers are encouraged to assist their children with these matters and to discuss any emerging issues or concerns about homework with teachers. Parents can also help children by reading to them and involving them in tasks at home as well as assisting them to organise their time.

In an answer to a question during the Estimates Committee hearings, the Minister for Education commented that he thought it was important that parents of younger students get involved in reading to their children and encouraging them in a range of activities. For older students, the focus is on parents helping their children to maintain a balance between their study commitments and their other activities such as playing sport or part-time work. Mr Welford said that homework is important but so are other healthy activities students also undertake.<sup>127</sup>

A major feature is a **guideline** for determining the amount of homework to be set according to age group which is as follows –

- in the **Prep Year**, students will generally not be given homework;
- in **Years 1-3**, set homework could be up to, but generally not more than, 2 to 3 hours per week. Tasks could include daily reading with parents/carers; preparing oral presentations; and linking concepts with activities such as shopping. There are many play or home activities that can help children in this age group to develop literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills;

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<sup>127</sup> Hon R Welford MP, Minister for Education and the Arts, Estimates Committee Education and the Arts, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 18 July 2006, p 13.

- in **Years 4 and 5**, homework could be up to, but generally not be more than, 2 to 3 hours each week and in **Years 6 and 7**, up to, but generally not more than, 3 to 4 hours each week;
- in **Years 8 and 9**, students should be given more responsibility for their own learning and required to engage in independent learning to complement their class work. Set homework could be up to, but generally not more than, 5 hours per week;
- in **Years 10, 11 and 12**, the amount of time spent on homework and independent study will vary according to individual learning needs and program of learning determined through their Senior Education and Training (SET) Plan. At this level, students should be able to exercise their own judgment about the amount of outside class hours they need to devote to studying but there needs to be care to ensure that there is a balance between study and other activities.

The summary document notes that it is open to parents/carers to consult with teachers about further materials or practice exercises that parents can use to assist their children at home.

## 6.1 RESPONSE TO THE POLICY GUIDELINES

The Queensland Teachers Union president, Steve Ryan, is reported to have said that the purpose of homework is to consolidate what was learnt in class and that the hours set out in the guidelines were fair and reasonable. He also is reported to have said that homework is an issue that involves consultation between parents, students and teachers and as expressing approval that the guidelines are not prescriptive.<sup>128</sup>

The president of the Queensland Council of Parents and Citizens Associations is said to have welcomed the guidelines saying that it was important that schools consulted with their local communities in drawing up a policy.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Tess Livingstone, 'Parents split on issue', *Courier Mail*, 18 July 2006, p 4.

<sup>129</sup> Tess Livingstone.



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