



Homework Policy

RATIONALE

The Bible makes it clear that the task of bringing up children is primarily the responsibility of parents¹ and that this instruction “in the Lord” should take place everywhere and all the time.² Our Mission³ recognises the educational task as a shared one in which the school assists the parents. The school takes on a large part of the formal aspects of educating of children. Most of the school learning takes place in the classroom under the instruction and guidance of teachers. However, schools may also set homework to:

- Complete work which could not be covered at school,
- Cover work which can be better accomplished at home than done in a classroom environment (e.g. wider research) or
- Reinforce, practice skills or extend what was completed at school.

Additionally, in seeking to share the educational process with parents, homework affords the opportunity to allow parents to be actively involved in school related learning (as well as in the classroom for those who are able.)

Unfortunately, homework can be a hindrance as well as a help in the overall process of bringing up children. The reasons for this are varied. At a simple level the amount of time spent on homework may be excessive and take away from more valuable family time. Harris Cooper in his article on Homework Research and Policy⁴ in discussing possible negative effects of homework notes “homework limits the time students can spend on leisure time and community activities that can impart important lessons, both academic and non academic.” Similarly, Kralovec and Buell, in their book *The End of Homework: how homework disrupts families, overburdens children and limits learning* argue that “baking cookies” may be more important than homework and write “we believe that the quality of relationships is enhanced by those moments of participating in the activities of daily life. They are transforming times in our relationships with our children”⁵

As Christians we believe from Scripture that relationships are critical⁶ and, while it is true that homework may sometimes provide a focus for developing relationships in a learning situation (eg reading to/with children), in many cases it does not. On the contrary, it may take away time from other more important family activities and cause tension and strain relationships between parents and children and between home and school. It may be necessary at times to require our children to do work they don’t necessarily enjoy. After all, our children are sinful and don’t always know or accept what is best for them. (We hold this in tension as teachers who are also fallen, as we seek to decide what is best for their learning). Nor should the less pleasant aspects of education simply be left to the school. However, if the homework is

¹ EPH 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

² DT 11:19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

³ **Vision:** Our desire is to be part of God’s plan to unite all things in heaven and on earth under the lordship of Jesus Christ, by...

Mission: ...assisting parents in the nurture of their children, providing a Christ centred, biblically grounded, culturally engaging and academically rigorous educations which equips the children to live for God’s glory.

⁴ *Homework Research and Policy: A Review of the Literature*, Harris Cooper, Research/Practice, Vol2 No 2, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, College of Education, University of Minnesota, 1994

⁵ *The End of Homework: how homework disrupts families, overburdens children and limits learning*, Etta Kralovec and John Bluell, Beacon Press, Boston, 2000.

⁶ Matthew 22:37-39.

not contributing to the education of the child in its fullest sense, or is detracting from more important education or relationship building at home then it should be abandoned.

Other factors that can make homework a hindrance are related to the fact that homework can be both good and bad in a particular situation. For example:

- practice or drill type homework may be helpful in consolidating learning but can also cause boredom for those who can already do the work or confusion and frustration, or even reinforcement of incorrect learning, for those who cannot;⁷
- preparation-type homework (eg reading material beforehand) may be of great benefit when there are clear directions about why, what and how they should read and unless they can understand what they are reading.⁷
- extension type homework (eg project, making a model, cooking) may be stimulating, educational and fun but may also be time consuming, distracting, expensive and burdensome on parents.⁷
- parental involvement which can be helpful and build relationships can also become parental interference, no matter how well meant, and may even confuse children if the teaching methods they employ are different from teachers. Clear information and instruction needs to be provided to parents in this regard, especially as students move into secondary school and need to take more responsibility for their learning and assignment work.

In addition:

- homework may lead to greater opportunities, and thus temptations, for sinful behaviours such as cheating through copying or receiving more assistance than is appropriate, or in an extreme case having someone else do the work for them
- homework can exacerbate existing social inequalities as students from lower socio-economic homes have less access to resources and a quiet, well lit place to work than their peers. They may also be more likely to have to work after school.⁸

Whatever the case, the education which the school provides should be seen as only part of the nurturing process and should avoid hindering other aspects of this nurturing which take place in the home.

Research

In the light of the above the question of just how valuable homework actually is becomes critical. Although there is a long tradition of assigning homework at all grade levels, research on homework shows experimental support for its effectiveness in increasing achievement only in the middle and senior years, with increasing effect in the higher grades.⁹ Most studies showed that in the secondary grades students receiving homework significantly outperformed students not receiving any homework (by up to 69% in senior years and half that in middle years) but in Primary years there was little if any effect. Similarly, where homework was compared with in-class supervised study in secondary years the benefits were about half what they were when compared with no homework but in the primary years in-class study proved superior. Finally, correlational studies showed that students who did more homework had better achievement in secondary years but again the correlation was almost zero in Primary years. (It should be noted that correlational studies do not establish a causal relation between homework and achievement.

⁷ *Homework, a Look at the Evidence*, Thomas M. Sherman, Pinkmonkey.com Parents Guide.

⁸ Harris Cooper, 1994

⁹ Harris Cooper, 1994

It may simply be that better schools with better students assign more homework, or that more academically inclined students tend to do more homework.)

Some research investigated the optimum amount of homework. Once again primary students' performance did not improve if they did more homework. Junior High (11-13 years old) students' continued to improve with increased homework until assignments took between one and two hours a night. Senior school students' performance continued to improve through to the highest point on the measurement scales.

Other research showed in summary:¹⁰

- Homework results in better achievement if it is distributed across a variety of assignments rather than only work covered that day;
- Homework involving practice and homework preparing for upcoming lessons both proved beneficial;
- Parent involvement did not affect its utility greatly (This was based on a few poorly designed studies. It probably reflects the fact that some parents may be very helpful while others may in fact do more harm than good);
- Individualising assignments had little effect on achievement (although it did significantly increase teachers' time spent on homework.)

This is not to say that there may not be benefits from homework other than academic achievement. Other positive effects often noted are that homework:

- promotes independence and responsibility;
- teaches self discipline;
- supplements and reinforces school learning;
- eases time constraints on the curriculum (in providing time for other work to be completed in class of collaborative value);
- encourages critical thinking, concept formation and information processing;
- encourages better study habits;
- creates a bond between home and school;
- provides for more parent and community involvement in schooling.

Unfortunately there is no conclusive research data which either supports or not the relation between homework and these purposes. Clearly the degree to which any of these might be achieved would depend on the way the homework is formulated, marked and supervised as well as the attitude of the student.

One last issue that needs to be considered is what type of work should be included as homework. Both the home and the school are concerned with educating the whole person, thus homework could potentially include all aspects of a child's education: spiritual, emotional, physical, intellectual, creative, behavioural etc. Nevertheless, to the extent that aspects of nurture can be separated, the home is particularly well placed to cover those aspects of education relating to spiritual, emotional and behavioural development whereas the school is best qualified in academic knowledge and skill development. Hence, the school should generally concentrate on the latter where parents are less likely to be able to help and so as not to

¹⁰ Harris Cooper, 1994

overly duplicate what is already happening in the home. This is not to say that homework could not include issues relating to Bible study or personal development, for example, as not all parents are skilled in these areas and the homework may provide an opportunity for parents to discuss such issues with their children. Certainly, homework should include those Christian perspectives that are also dealt with in the school.

Conclusion

The following guidelines seek to take into account all the issues discussed above.

Junior School

Purpose

The purpose of homework in Junior School at Covenant is:

1. To provide an opportunity for parents to become actively involved in their child's schooling;
2. To continue and extend learning experiences which have begun at school using resources, human or other, at home and in the community;
3. To allow time and opportunity for practice, consolidation and extension of experiences covered in school;
4. To prepare students for Secondary years by getting them used to doing homework as well as giving opportunity to develop disciplined individual study habits and independent research skills.

Guidelines

Homework will be given according to the following guidelines. Parents and teachers will be given a copy of these guidelines at the start of each year.

1. The responsibility of parents to direct what school work is completed at home is respected.
2. Teachers will seek to support individual parents in their decisions regarding homework and will encourage children to do likewise.
3. In this regard, the rigours of outside school activities will be recognised and respected by teachers.
4. Subject to the above, it is expected that parents will support the homework policy by taking all reasonable steps to ensure homework is completed on time and communicating promptly with the school if problems are experienced or expectations cannot be met.
5. Communication between school and home will normally be by written notice of homework at the appointed time of each week. Parents or teachers may make additional comments on the homework in the appropriate place/manner as directed by the teacher.
6. Parents should communicate with teachers about their child's homework when it cannot be completed.
7. Homework should be meaningful, helpful, fair, as interesting as practicable and at times integrated with family life.
8. In setting homework, teachers will try to take into account individual student interests and abilities. However, teachers will not be expected to individualise the homework to an extent that it places an unfair burden on them.

9. The ability to opt out of homework will be offered to parents of students in Years K – 4. However, teachers will set homework that parents can opt in for.
10. Thus in general the onus for selecting K – 4 “homework” will be on parents. Attached to this policy are some suggested alternatives including over 120 ideas to assist in this.
11. Formal, whole class, compulsory homework will be introduced in Years 5 and 6.
12. All homework will be communicated at the beginning of the week/period. Each piece of homework will have a minimum of two nights to complete. It will not be expected that students do homework on the weekends other than in special circumstances or if requested by the student.
13. Teachers on different classes in the same grade will consult to ensure there is equity in regard to the amount and general nature of homework set.
14. Teachers will communicate homework expectations for each class. This may be at the start of the year for regular homework, at the start of a week, or individually for specific assignments.
15. Teachers will avoid setting new/unfamiliar work for homework except in cases of extension where a student is to be particularly challenged.
16. Teachers will generally indicate how long homework is expected to take and will seek to be aware of how much time children actually spend on various tasks.
17. As a guide to parents, teachers will suggest maximum times to be spent on set homework for each grade level. These times should not be regarded by either teachers or parents as required time to be spent on homework each night but rather the maximum time that the school would normally expect.
18. Maximum suggested times per day for homework from Monday to Thursday are:
 - Kindergarten: 10 min
 - Years 1 and 2: 20 min
 - Years 3 and 4: 30-40 min
 - Years 5 and 6: 40-60 min
19. Teachers will as far as possible check all set homework and give verbal or written feedback providing suggestions for correction or improvement where appropriate.
20. In general, homework will not be given a mark or graded. If it is to be marked (for a major project) teachers will clearly indicate how it will be marked including marking criteria.
21. If specialist teachers (in Year 6) wish to set homework, they will negotiate a suitable length and timing with the Class teacher to ensure total homework expectations are not unreasonable. For projects, major assignments and assessment tasks, or other significant pieces of homework (i.e. those requiring more than a few days to complete) teacher will include the following in the written notice of the work:
 - The specific or main educational purpose of the work;
 - How the work will be marked including marking criteria (to show what aspects of the work are important and therefore will receive greater weight);
 - Any maximum or minimum limits to the size of the work.
 - The extent to which parents can, should or are required to assist with the work outside general guidelines (see below);
 - The expected cost of the work, especially when making things should be modest.

22. Parents are asked to adhere to the following guidelines when helping with projects and major assignments:

- The assignments are designed for students to do. Parents should not do the assignment or parts of the assignment.
- Parents can give guidance on how to locate resources (e.g. appropriate books from school or local libraries, find maps/diagrams/pictures/appropriate web sites) but not find them for the student.
- Parents can help students organize their time: e.g. set dates, apportion parts of the assignment.
- Parents can discuss presentation plans but should allow the child to set out the work themselves.
- Parents may assist a child by directing a child through questioning to a correct method or process, or even model a correct method using other examples.
- If parents have gone beyond these guidelines, they should acknowledge this in a brief note (perhaps on the assignment) to the teacher, so that the teacher is warned of a possible problem area which needs correction/reinforcement, and so it can be taken into account in any assessment if appropriate. (a parent may type up an assignment for a student.)

Secondary School

Purpose

The purpose of homework in Secondary School at Covenant is:

1. To continue and extend learning experiences which have begun at school using resources, human or other, at home and in the community;
2. To allow time and opportunity for concentrated study in areas where special effort is needed, for practice, consolidation, remediation and extension of experiences covered in school;
3. To develop disciplined individual study habits and use independent research skills.
4. To provide an opportunity for parents to be involved in their child's schooling;
5. To provide opportunities for service (responsive discipleship).

Guidelines

Homework will be given according to the following guidelines. Parents and teachers will be informed of these guidelines at the start of each year.

1. The responsibility of parents to direct what school work is done in their homes is respected.
2. Teachers will seek to support individual parents in their decisions regarding homework and will encourage children to do likewise.
3. In this regard the rigours of outside school activities will be recognised and respected by teachers.
4. Subject to the above, it is expected that parents will support the homework policy by taking all reasonable steps to ensure homework is completed on time and communicating promptly with the school if problems are experienced or expectations cannot be met.

5. Staff should encourage students to plan their studies and in particular to note when assignments/projects are due. Students are expected to maintain a homework diary to assist with this.
6. Communication of homework requirements will normally be by student notation in their diary or, especially in the case of formal assessment tasks and other major assignments, by a written notice of the homework as well as a term planner of major assessments.. Parents or teachers may make additional comments on the homework by writing a note, email or other methods of communication as required.
7. Homework should be meaningful, helpful, fair, interesting as practicable.
8. In setting homework teachers will try to take into account individual student interests and abilities. However, teachers will not be expected to individualise the homework to an extent that it places an unfair burden on them.
9. Teachers on equivalent classes in the same subject will consult together to ensure there is equity in regard to the amount and general nature of homework set.
10. Teachers will communicate homework expectations for each class. This may be at the start of the year for regular homework, at the start of a week, or individually for a specific assignment.
11. Teachers will avoid setting new work for homework except in cases of extension where a student is to be particularly challenged or in preparation for a future lesson.
12. Teachers will generally indicate how long homework is expected to take and will seek regular feedback from parents on how much time children actually spend on various tasks.
13. Years 7-12 are provided with suggested time guidelines for Homework. These times should not be regarded by either teachers or parents as required time to be spent on homework each night but rather the average time that the school would normally expect. As students progress through the school they are encouraged to develop responsibility in setting their own study and homework goals.
 - Years 7 & 8 - at most 1½ hrs, 3-4 nights per week
 - Years 9 & 10 - at most 2 hrs, 3-4 nights per week
 - Years 11 & 12 - approximately 3 hrs minimum, most nights of the week (assuming students make good use of study periods at school to complete homework also).

NB Teachers should be differentiating homework to meet the individual needs of students

14. Year Coordinators will monitor homework expectations in their areas of responsibility to ensure the total time required for homework or assessments from all subjects at any week is not unreasonable.
15. It is important that senior students are able to have reasonable holidays. Staff should therefore avoid setting too much homework over the holidays in order to leave time for study, e.g. do not set work that is due immediately after the holidays. Year Coordinators should monitor homework to ensure that senior students do not have total homework which would take more than one week to complete in a two week holiday break. Major Works may add to the holiday workload depending on individual student needs and projects.
16. Teachers shall not set homework which falls due in the week before major assessment periods or when they have assessments due, except with the special approval of the Deputy Principal Curriculum.

17. Teachers will as far as possible check and correct all set homework and give verbal or written feedback on how well it was done, giving suggestions for correction or improvement where appropriate.
18. Often homework will not be given a mark or graded. If it is to be marked (eg for a major project) teachers will clearly indicate how it will be marked including marking criteria.
19. For projects, major assignments and assessment tasks, or other significant pieces of homework (i.e. those requiring more than a few days to complete) teacher will include the following in the written notice of the work:
 - The specific or main educational purpose of the work;
 - How the work will be marked including marking criteria (to show what aspects of the work are important and therefore will receive greater weight);
 - Any maximum or minimum limits to the size of the work (eg 600 – 1000 words);
 - The extent to which parents can, should or are required to assist with the work outside general guidelines (see below);
 - The expected cost of the work, especially when making things should be modest.
20. Parents are asked to adhere to the following guidelines when helping with projects and major assignments:
 - The assignments are designed for students to do. Parents should not do the assignment or parts of the assignment.
 - Parents can give guidance on how to locate resources (eg appropriate books from school or local libraries, find maps/diagrams/pictures/appropriate web sites) but not find them for the student.
 - Parents can help students organise their time: eg set dates, apportion parts of the assignment.
 - Parents can discuss presentation plans but should allow the child to set out the work themselves.
 - Parents may assist a child by directing a child through questioning to a correct method or process, or even model a correct method using other examples.
 - If parents have gone beyond these guidelines, they should acknowledge this in a brief note (perhaps on the assignment) to the teacher, so that the teacher is warned of a possible problem area which needs correction/reinforcement, and so it can be taken into account in any assessment if appropriate (a parent may type up an assignment for a student).