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**Homework, help or hindrance? A Case Study investigating teachers'
perspectives of homework in a mainstream primary school.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract:

Homework plays an important role in the education of children and young people Xu (2013), providing children with opportunities to reflect and practice learning away from the school environment (Dolean and Lervag 2022).

Homework is seen as one of the leading strategies to close gaps in learning (Strauss, 2017; Sayers *et al*, 2022) and build strong connections between school and home (Tait and Prodger, 2021; Goodhall, 2021; Medwell and Wray, 2019; Bodovski, Munoz and Aposostolescu, 2022; Hopkins, 2022). The potentially damaging effects of homework on the individual and the family are also considered (Weir, 2016), but above all the consideration of child led practice for accessibility is central (Piaget, 1950, cited in Keenan, 2016) to mirror classroom practice. Reading is a central idea within this being multi-dimensional homework, developing independence, building knowledge, and supporting social and emotional learning (Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, 2022; Medwell and Wray, 2019; Hopkins, 2022; EEF, 2021) and is perceived as being accessible for most children and families.

This case study research was carried out within a small village school in England, with 8 participants overall (7 teaching staff and the Headteacher) and sought to investigate teachers' perspectives on homework. Data was collected using both questionnaires and some semi-structured interviews. The findings show the need for accessibility of homework to ensure that the practice of homework is as effective as possible. Findings highlight how although parental involvement is good for building connections between school and home, it should be minimal, and the child should have autonomy over their learning. Reading held a core focus due to its centrality to most learning. This paper considers reading, parental

involvement and the overall purpose of homework and its relevance in teachers' perspectives on homework whilst noting the importance of mirrored classroom practice standards in homework for maximum effect.

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Homework, help or hindrance? A Case Study investigating teachers' perspectives of homework in a mainstream primary school.

1. Introduction

Homework forms an important part of the school experience for children and young people (Xu, 2013). Often seen as a rite of passage within education, homework has become a topic of controversy and debate in recent years with parents, pupils and teachers all having highly charged and divisive views (Hallam, 2006; Dabell, 2019; Medwell and Wray, 2019). This case study investigates teachers' perspectives on homework, in a small village primary school, to consider if homework is a help or hindrance. The rationale for this study came from observing homework as a regular practice in classrooms, but often a practice that comes with embedded negative associations. Therefore, this study investigates perspectives on homework from the very people who set it to understand the role of homework from teachers' perspectives. Data from the research indicated three key themes from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These themes were:

- The importance of reading,
- Parental and home influence
- The purpose of homework.

To address the research question, this paper will consider each theme in relation to existing literature and theories with findings from this study, discuss the research methods used in the study to explore teachers' perspectives, as well as discuss and conclude how findings could inform future practice.

2. Literature Review

Literature defines homework as tasks assigned to students completed outside of school hours (Cooper, 1989; Goodall, 2021) Guidance on homework has not been updated since the removal of an Ofsted (1999) policy in 2012, dictating a requirement of one hour of homework per week for 7-5-year-olds. This came after criticism of homework infringing on family time (Galloway, Conner, and Pope, 2013; Katz, Buzukashvili and Feingold, 2012; Pressman *et al*, 2015) and unfairly benefiting pupils from more affluent backgrounds (Medwell and Wray, 2019). This section will review existing literature surrounding homework and consider the importance of reading, parental involvement, and the purpose of homework as central themes.

2.1 The Importance of Reading

Reading is a common theme within existing literature around homework (Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, 2022; Medwell and Wray, 2019; Hopkins, 2022; EEF, 2021). Research on 'reading for pleasure', notes a positive relationship between reading frequency, enjoyment, and attainment (Clark, 2011; Clark and Douglas, 2011; DfE, 2012). Medwell and Wray (2019) note reading as a frequent homework task within a primary setting and acknowledge the positive effects of shared reading at home.

Orkin, May and Wolf (2017) note how ongoing pressures to develop reading standards will result in a continued emphasis on home-based practice and go on to discuss the importance of the environment to support positive outcomes. However, the National Literacy Trust report (Clark and Picton, 2021) found that only 30.1% of children read daily outside the classroom, with one suggested reason for this being a lack of financial stability within

families for children to have their own books. The DFE (2012) noted the importance of children having books of their own to give them choice, which would ultimately support the uptake of reading for pleasure.

Interestingly, Clark and Rumbold (2006) proposed introducing thematic rewards such as book vouchers to promote reading motivation and combat financial barriers. They also note the additional benefits of reading for pleasure besides raising attainment including its potential to broaden knowledge, improve comprehension and grammar reading attitudes and highlight the social and emotional benefits for later life. Orkin, May and Wolf (2017) mirror these ideas and add how engaging in reading can reduce stress, which ultimately supports positive mental health.

Rou and Yunus (2020) explore the use of online education platforms such as 'Seesaw', to promote engagement with reading. They discuss how sharing experiences, feedback and ideas online promotes engagement. However, Loan (2009) considers how new technology threatens reading habits and interest. Nevertheless, it could be argued that engagement in an online learning platform engages children of a technology-driven society more in reading and encourages them to use technology positively to support learning outside of school. Theodosiadou and Konstantinidis' (2015) extend the value of technology, noting the value of E-portfolios for parental involvement. Considering how parents considered them to add value to their child's learning and better supported their understanding of learning.

2.2 Parental and Home Influences

Parental influences are a key factor in homework, particularly as parents are the first teachers of their children (Syla, 2023) and building connections between school and home is a key advantage of homework (Tait and Prodger, 2021; Goodhall, 2021; Medwell and Wray, 2019; Bodovski, Munoz and Aposostolescu, 2022; Hopkins, 2022). However, parents must know how best to support their children for homework to have the greatest effect.

Literature highlights negative aspects of parental support, noting how parents can be over-involved in their children's homework, resulting in the child's work no longer being their own (Bodovski, Munoz and Apsostolescu, 2022). Pressman *et al* (2015) consider the impacts of this, highlighting how when parents 'successfully' intervene in homework they obscure the gaps in knowledge that would have otherwise been discovered by the teacher.

Although, it could be argued that the reason for adult intervention in homework is often to ensure work is simply completed (Kremer-Sadlik and Gutierrez, 2013; Calaraco, 2020).

Homework can be the cause of family tension and conflict, and ultimately impact children's mental well-being (Carmichael and MacDonald, 2016; Goodhall and Johnston-Wilder, 2015; Ofsted, 2017; Pressman *et al* 2015 and Weir, 2016; Tsang, Yan-Yan Dang and Moorhouse, 2022; Syla, 2023; Jeynes, 2012). Whalley and Chandler (2021) consider, how frustration can arise if younger children are left to work independently, whilst Hopkins (2022) and Hutchinson (2012) consider the effect of unrealistic parental expectations of the child as a contributing factor to frustrations. However, some argue that most parents simply want their children to be happy and fulfilled (Tait and Prodger, 2021) and that parental involvement is often a natural instinct (Whalley and Chandler, 2021) and a result of trying to minimise stress and frustration to support the child.

Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu (2022) acknowledge the pressure that homework can place on families. Research notes that most parents are not trained as teachers and often are not equipped with the right skills and knowledge to effectively support their child. (Calarco, 2018;2020; Sayers *et al*, 2022). Sayers *et al* (2022) highlight how for some teachers “if a child gets no homework, then all is well at school.” (pg. 14). This illustrates existing perceptions within education that homework should be used to fill gaps in learning. Strauss (2017) reinforced this arguing that homework is a useful tool to close gaps that school hours do not allow for, and that “no homework” policies could negatively impact children’s attainment. Dolean and Lervag (2022) further develop this by considering how homework facilitates coverage of ideas and thus reduces teacher workload. Although there is research to suggest homework has little impact on attainment at Primary age, (Hattie, 2012; EEF, 2021; Orkin, May and Wolf, 2017) and instead has negative impacts on overall well-being, (Weir, 2016; Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, 2022; Dabell, 2019; Tsang, Yan-Yan Dang and Moorhouse, 2022; Dabell, 2019).

Robinson and Harris (2014) consider how ‘parental stage setting’ best supports success, as opposed to traditional parental involvement. ‘Parental stage setting’ means parents support their children and create an atmosphere where children are seen as capable and autonomous in learning. Although, one barrier to effective stage setting is the parent’s personal experiences of education and subsequently possible negative attitudes (Tait and Prodger, 2021). Therefore, building positive relationships with parents is important to breaking barriers. For this Arnold (2021) discuss the importance of parents feeling valued and heard and not seen as just ‘helpers’, but rather acknowledged as valuable knowledge holders. Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, (2022) highlight how teachers frequently

depend on parental support. This could be for engaging in tasks such as reading and literacy practice or supporting understanding of the curriculum. To ensure that parental support is effective homework needs to be accessible to parents- which it is often not (Goodhall, 2021), to make good use of their knowledge.

In an early years based study, Tait and Prodger (2021) discuss the positive impact of drop-in sessions for parents, to encourage the development of subject knowledge and a better understanding of the curriculum. This can be particularly useful when trying to reach parents of children from low socioeconomic backgrounds (LSES). In 2014 Baker *et al* (2014) recorded that 14% of the most deprived children spent no time on homework, compared to 5% from the most affluent backgrounds. They noted that 53% of children in 'outstanding' schools spent 3 plus hours on homework per week versus a mirrored 30% in 'inadequate' schools. This illustrates how homework contributes to widening the achievement gap for deprived students, where support may not be as readily available (Rønning, 2011; Medwell and Wray, 2019; Sayers *et al*, 2022). However, as Tait and Prodger (2021) consider, for a lot of LSES families the lack of support with homework does not always come from a lack of willing, but rather a lack of time as they are often the parents trying to provide for their families. Therefore, for homework to be successful teachers should ensure a clear purpose at an appropriate level and contextual for the child (Vatterott, 2010) to meet individual needs, minimising the need for parental support (Teaching Schools Council for Effective Primary teaching practice, 2016) and allowing children ownership over learning.

2.3 The Purpose of Homework

Despite best intentions, when parents help struggling children, it is argued that they often do not consider how doing so may hurt their child's performance as they can obscure gaps in learning (as discussed in 2.2) (Robinson and Harris, 2014; Yurk Quadlin, 2015). Therefore, the homework intent being contextual, purposeful, and clear is key for homework to be effective and reliable. Sylva (2023) echoes this notion, adding the importance of a well-designed piece of homework, considering how the quality of the homework design can affect outcomes. They argue that homework should reinforce and consolidate classroom learning - a point echoed throughout topical literature (EEF, 2021; Goodhall, 2021; Lohmann, 2014; Hopkins, 2022; Medwell and Wray, 2019) and discuss how homework can be effective and enhance learning when clearly intended. Kelleher (2017) reinforces this, discussing the positive impact of the right types of homework. As discussed in 2.1, the positive effects of reading could exemplify as the 'right type of homework' with multiple benefits of extending knowledge, consolidating skills, and supporting social and emotional development.

Nevertheless, one barrier to purposeful homework is a lack of training for teachers (Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, 2022). Vatterott (2018) discusses this, extending ideas from previous research, that despite growing concerns over issues with homework itself, the issue lies more with a lack of training on effective homework practices- a concept echoed by Sylva (2023). Furthermore, the literature suggests that teachers do not see homework as a priority, with teaching assistants often managing homework. This may explain its lack of value for progression (Dolean and Lervag, 2022; Jeynes, 2012) as only 9.4%

of teachers were reported to mark homework to inform future learning (Medwell and Wray, 2019).

However, other literature argues the importance of homework reflecting on and reviewing learning (Bodovski, Munoz and Apostolescu, 2022). Skates' (2021) ideas support the benefits of reflective learning for homework highlighting how reflective tasks encourage children to analyse learning and apply it to aspects of life.

As homework is an extension of school, effective homework practice means ensuring equal opportunities for children filters into home learning. The EEF (2021) highlight the importance of teachers recognising barriers to homework completion, and how homework experiences can drastically vary for each child (Syla, 2023). The SEND code of practice (2015) notes the responsibility of practitioners to ensure that children with additional needs can make a successful transition into adulthood, be it for employment or higher education training. Therefore, if homework is to be a tool to support classroom practice it should be accessible for every child. A study into early years practice, when involving parents with learning, acknowledges the importance of meeting the needs of children and families (Tait and Prodger, 2021). As discussed in 2.1, E-Portfolios could be a positive way to involve parents and accommodate specific needs allowing children to explore tasks using different mediums such as video and audio.

Moreover, when considering the continuation of classroom learning as a part of homework, it is important to reflect on how practices can be mirrored in homework. Piaget's (Piaget 1950, cited in Keenan 2016) constructivist ideas of a child-led environment further emphasise the need for homework to be accessible and reflective of a child-led environment. Stenger (2014) highlights how an initial curiosity prepares the brain for

learning and makes subsequent learning more enjoyable and rewarding. Child-led learning facilitates children to act on their curiosities and act on their interests- a concept Peacock (2016) notes the importance of.

Rink *et al* (2010, cited in Driscoll and Linker, 2022) consider how homework can be turned into 'home fun', discussing how homework is not always a pleasant part of a child's evening and how 'home fun' could capture their interest and curiosity. Their ideas use different mediums to support home learning [Appendix 3.], including the use of online learning journals and wider curriculum subjects such as physical education. They discuss the dual development of skills alongside academia to support different areas of the curriculum and draw upon children's interests. Epstein *et al* (2021) develop this, noting how although the focus of interactive assignments may remain on the core curriculum, including activities to promote discussion, dialogue and learning in practice would be beneficial. Kolb (2015) considers the importance of active learning for long-term retention. Therefore, when considering homework for consolidation of learning, there is an argument to deviate from more traditional practices and encourage active learning to support learning retention. Furthermore, Kurt and Tas (2019) discuss a "mastery orientation" approach to homework that seeks to encourage children to value learning for its own sake rather than for external academic validation. The goal is for learning to be seen as continuous rather than being school exclusive, but rather a lifelong process. However, there is discussion around homework-supporting skills beyond the academic curriculum. Existing literature notes another purpose of homework is to develop skills such as responsibility, independence, time management and self-discipline (Dolean, Lervag, 2022; Syla, 2023; Epstein and Van Voorhis,

2001) which are all skills supporting in preparing children for life, ensuring they are equipped with skills to flourish in the wider world (Cohen, 2006).

3. Research Methodology

This section will focus on the research methods used within this small-scale study. This research seeks to investigate teachers' perspectives on homework in a mainstream primary school. The research was carried out in a small school with 8 teaching staff. The 8 teachers and the Headteacher made a possible 9 participants. The study had 7 active participants in total.

The research adopted a case study approach. A case study is a strategy for research exploring a specific subject area within a real-life context (Robinson and McCartan, 2016; Punch, 2014). Despite case studies being highly individualised (Flyvbjerg, 2011), they allow the researcher to conduct in-depth investigations (Ashely, 2021) considered in relation to a wider set of theoretical ideas (Yin, 2018). A further strength of case studies is that they have more potential to make inferences about intrinsic systems, for example understanding teachers' perspectives on homework in relation to a wider understanding of the question of if it is a help or hindrance (Gerring, 2016).

3.1 Data collection and analysis

Case study research often relies on multiple methods and sources of data collection (Ashley, 2021; Robinson and McCartan, 2016). Therefore, a mixed methods approach was deemed appropriate for data collection as the main aim was to gather and understand teachers' perspectives (Punch, and Oancea, 2014). A mixed methods approach uses a combination of two or more types of data and methods to facilitate a more detailed understanding (Burke

Johnson, 2021). Furthermore, the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data can be combined to balance the weaknesses of each.

One method of data collection used was a feedback questionnaire (Tymms, 2021). This aimed to collect perspectives on homework and was issued to every teacher. The questionnaire collected both quantitative and qualitative data, as per the style of a feedback questionnaire. As Tymms (2021) points out, it is important to have a short questionnaire to maintain the interest of participants. Therefore, the questionnaire contained 12 questions to maximise participation [Appendix 1].

The second method of data collection used was semi-structured interviews for two participants [Appendix 5]. These were singular interviews to get a sense of individual's attitudes (Dawson *et al* 2019). The headteacher was interviewed to get an overall understanding of the school's position on homework, whilst the Early years foundation stage (EYFS) lead was selected based on their role in early reading, a theme identified of significance within homework. With parents and the purpose of homework as additional themes, both were well selected in their job roles to gather a more in-depth understanding. Conducting in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeper and journey into another perspective (Mears, 2021). At the heart of each interview was an interest in an individual perspective (Seidman, 2019) Interviews were no longer than 15 minutes to ensure that participants were comfortable (Baker and Edwards, 2012) and perspectives were clear. However, one limitation of semi-structured interviews is the potential for observers paradox. This means that the interviewee may unconsciously alter their answers as they are more aware that someone is listening, or that they are being recorded (Labov, 1972). This

was combatted through building a rapport with interviewees to ensure that they felt comfortable throughout the interview.

The data in this research reflects 3 themes that illustrate the most common opinions of teachers' perspectives within this specific setting as outlined in section 1. The identification of these themes was a result of thematic coding. Thematic coding is a data analysis approach, recognised within the field of educational research and a method used to identify meaning within data (Gibbs, 2021). Both quantitative and qualitative data were coded. This helped to identify 3 codes that formed the basis of the themes discussed in the findings and literature review. Mean calculations were also used to analyse quantitative data. However, percentages were not used, instead an average point on number scales used in questions was found so as not to misrepresent a small data set and maintain the integrity of the findings.

3.2 Limitations

The data collected represents teacher perspectives on homework successfully. Adopting a mixed methods approach ensured that despite only 5/7 responses to the survey being entirely consistent, each stage of learning was effectively represented. However, as homework is such a controversial topic, gaining the perspectives of teachers such as those from schools with different demographics and sizes would be beneficial to consider the subject in a broader context. Furthermore, if the study were to be repeated, ensuring the response to questions was compulsory and could only be answered once, would be useful to make the data more reliable (with the option of withdrawal at any time). So as not to repeat data and compromise anonymity interviews were selected based on common ideas from the questionnaire. One of the two interviews was recorded and transcribed, whilst the

other participant declined to be recorded in the interview, and in the absence of a recording, notes were made during the interview to maintain ethical integrity. It is not believed that this impacted on the validity of the data.

3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration means considering all of the values that should inform the work of the researcher (Hammersley, 2021). Ethical issues were appropriately considered before carrying out the research (Punch, 2009). Ethical clearance was obtained and approved using the York St John ethical clearance forms, and gate-keeper consent was granted (in this case from the headteacher). Consent from each participant was gained at the beginning of each questionnaire for their data to be used in addition to signed permission forms [Appendix 2.] for the two participants who took part in semi-structured interviews. Participants knew that they could withdraw at any time, knowing that they would be anonymised within the study and were given confidence that their data would be stored securely (Hammersley, 2021). Ethical considerations, as laid out by the university, have been adhered to throughout the study.

4. Findings

The evidence collected from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews spotlighted three key themes:

- The importance of reading
- Parental and home influences
- The purpose of homework

4.1 The Importance of Reading

Across learning stages, teachers identified reading as a focus area of homework, with reading being a key theme in what teachers perceived to be the most important homework (Figure 1.). The Headteacher identified reading as one of the best homework tasks for overall interaction, which has fed into a recent school homework policy shift to ensure purposeful homework with reading at the centre. This was noticeable in the school, with reading schemes used to support reading uptake with integrated incentives for children to take part.

Understanding the school's priority of reading became clear in interviews, where both interviewees identified early reading and phonics as key to building a foundation for other learning and unlocking knowledge that supported other learning. The phonics and early reading lead emphasised that although homework was mostly optional throughout the school, they tried to ensure that parents knew that the school advised that children should be reading daily in some capacity above anything else.

Teachers noted that reading and phonics work, encouraged parents to share and support their child's learning journey while encouraging them to become independent learners, exploring through reading. They also noted reading as something accessible for most parents and promoted reading for pleasure both in and outside of school. The school's eagerness to promote reading was clear as reading was well woven into school life and the curriculum (School policy- see Appendix 4).

Class teachers' perspectives on the most important homework to support children's learning
Reading
Social skills, learning the skills to be resilient, know how to cook, look after themselves, tie their own shoe laces, be responsible for their own belongings.
Reading at home and partaking in conversations with parents about what they have been learning.
Reading and enjoying books
Discussion
Some homework 'menu' linked to a current topic where children can be creative and further explore things, they have learnt in school that they are interested in. It should be optional, and the aim would be to foster the children's curiosity and help them to see that learning doesn't end at 3:15. It shouldn't feel like 'work'!

Figure 1: Responses from question 11 on the questionnaire sent to class teachers.

4.2 Parental and Home Influences

Data suggests that parental involvement has both advantages and disadvantages. Teachers noted homework being beneficial to building strong partnerships between school and home. One resource used to support this was the use of an online learning journal to support learning and communicate at home. This allowed teachers to support parents in their delivery of learning where necessary as well as ensuring a clear understanding of the intent behind learning both for schoolwork and homework.

However, teachers often commented on the challenges of parental involvement. Emphasis was placed on the possibility of parents teaching their children in the 'wrong way',

particularly with younger children who need more adult support when completing homework. Thus, the possibility of misconceptions arising was given as a reason why maths homework was not as highly prioritised. One teacher identified a challenging curriculum as a challenge as some parents do not have the correct subject knowledge to help their children. Therefore, to support this the school ran parent workshops to aid understanding and provided helpful resources, such as website links and flashcards, to assist learning at home. Resources were also provided for larger projects to encourage engagement and ensure accessibility for every family.

Teachers highlighted the eagerness of most parents to support, describing how they often sought advice on what they could do at home. Teachers commented on the benefits of such eagerness to support children's learning for reinforcing classwork and targeting gaps in knowledge for individual children. However, homework was perceived by teachers to be a contributor to the widening in attainment of children, particularly those who do not receive as much support at home. One teacher noted how they felt that setting homework online removes the burden on parents to support children as they can be more independent in their learning. Interviews also identified an understanding that most children had access to some kind of device, therefore homework was often geared towards technology to encourage independence. The Headteacher also reported positive engagement with online tasks as a reason for their use.

The Headteacher also highlighted how they perceived that leaving homework open-ended and optional for the children encouraged engagement and promoted independence. Although they commented that where parental support was concerned, there were four key expectations of homework for parents.

These were:

1. To be supportive.
2. Make sure the child completes it.
3. Read to their children.
4. Encourage their children to read.

4.3 The Purpose of Homework

When asked to identify the purpose of homework, 3 of the 6 respondents identified that homework should develop wider skills and curiosity for learning. Whilst 2 thought homework should be to apply existing learning, whilst another identified homework as a tool for consolidating learning (Figure 2.)

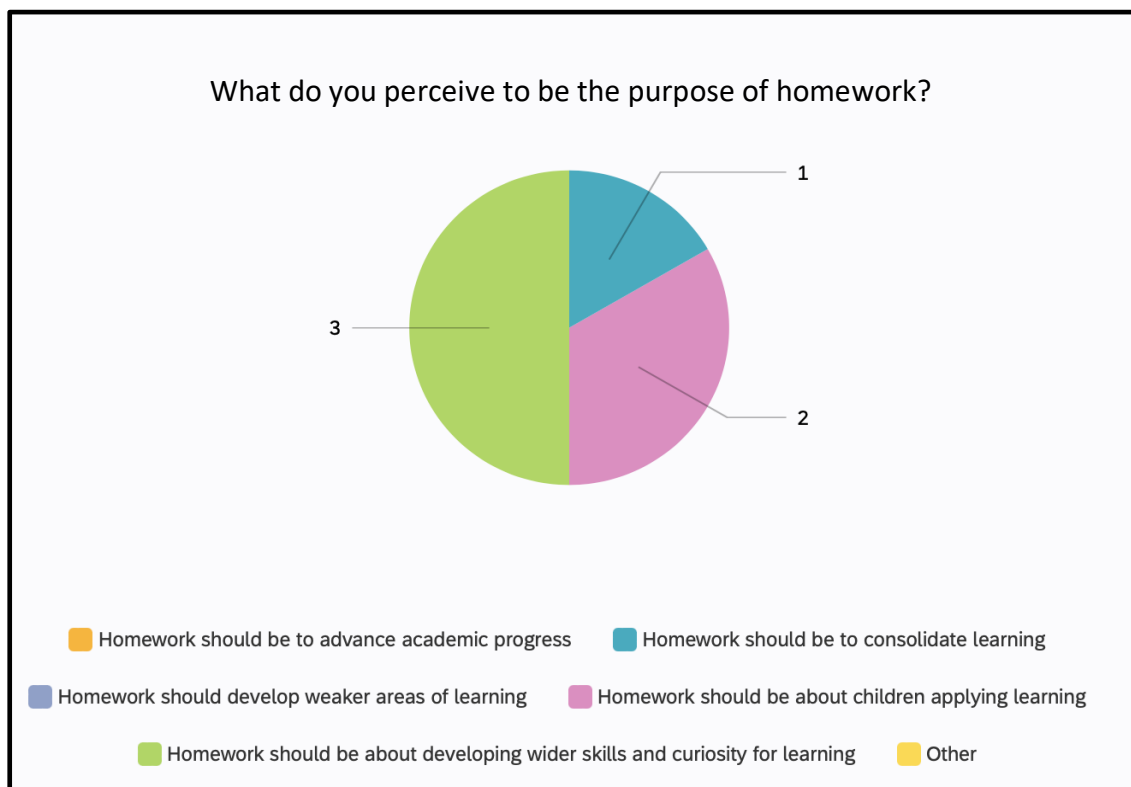


Figure 2. A pie chart showing which options teachers believed homework's purpose to be. From question 8.

Semi-structured interviews identified that homework should have a clear purpose and that setting homework for 'the sake of it' was unhelpful and created problems. The Headteacher commented on worksheets being pointless and argued that a more active learning-by-questions approach was beneficial, as advocated for personalised and targeted homework, to support gaps in learning.

However, when asked to rate homework on a scale ranging from 'Not useful' to 'Extremely useful' an average score of 37.67 showed teachers only perceiving it as 'slightly useful' overall. Teachers were also asked to consider the use of homework as a reflection of ability. 2 identified homework as being 'not effective at all', whilst 2 suggested 'slightly effective' and one noted it as 'moderately effective'. No participants indicated that homework was 'effective' or 'extremely effective' to reflect ability (Figure 3.). This could suggest existing homework tasks are not being used to identify or monitor the closing of gaps in learning. However, one reason for this was identified as the role of parental intervention (particularly in younger years).

One teacher commented:

"You can quite clearly see when it comes back the children who have done it independently and those where an adult has sat and drawn a line with a ruler ...where we just want them to make a mark... if it is that adult driven there's not much point in setting it". [Interview response, 31st March 2023]

This could highlight a lack of differentiation in homework as it could be implied that teachers would expect to see drastic differences in what the child could do independently versus what they observe- potentially implying the child has found the work too difficult. It

may also imply that the intent of the homework has not been made clear to the child, highlighting the importance of parental communication.

In addition, when asked to consider the positive impact of homework on pupils, the scale average of 48.50 indicated that teachers consider that homework ‘might or might not’ have a positive effect. Interestingly, one teacher in the questionnaire identified that:

“Setting laborious tasks in a book inevitably leads to tears!” [Questionnaire response, 22nd March 2023]

This highlights how teachers considered children and families' well-being as an important factor within their perspectives of homework. Additionally, in interview, the phonics lead commented on how homework can cut into family time and that when children go home, homework is likely not to be a priority. This may further explain the parental interventions noticed by teachers.

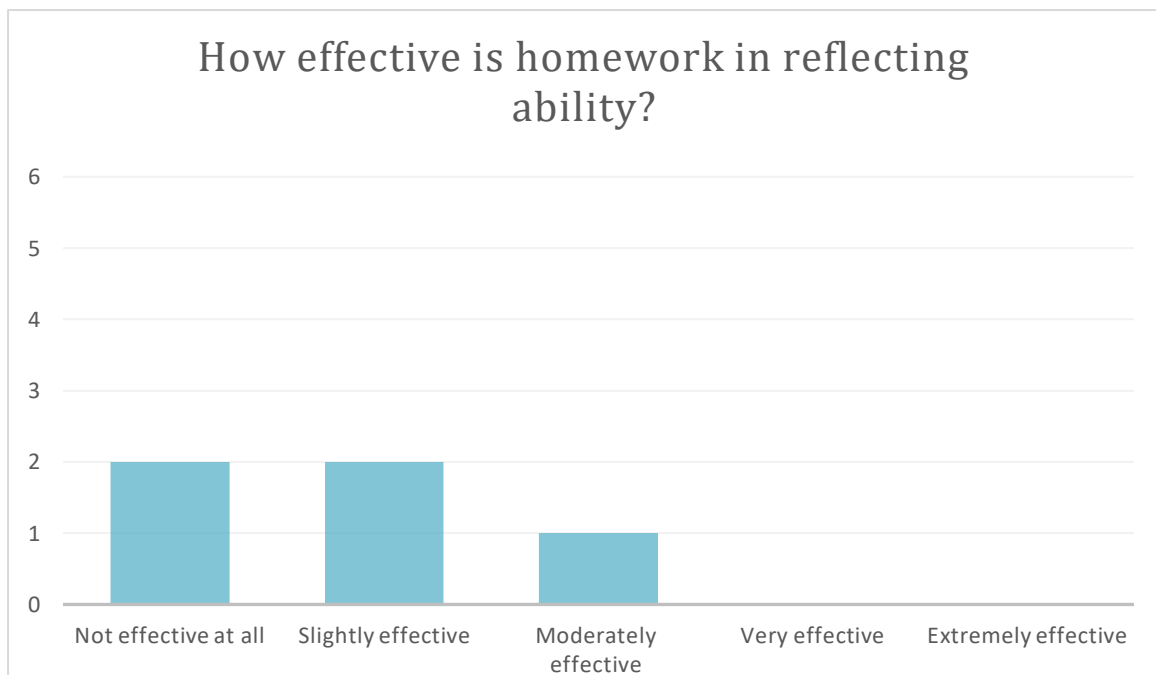


Figure 3. A bar graph showing teachers' perspectives on homework as a reflection of ability.

Teachers were also asked if they felt that the wider curriculum was underrepresented in homework. Although, of 7 overall participants of the questionnaire, there were 8 responses to this question, indicating that one participant had answered twice, potentially invalidating the question results. However, with a high level of question engagement, this may suggest this specific question is an area of interest for teachers. As per Figure 4, the majority of participants 'strongly disagreed' whilst 2 'strongly agreed' that it was underrepresented, thus indicating divisive opinions. Figure 1 illustrates how one teacher believed that homework should include children's interests and that they should have some autonomy over their learning, the response to this question may infer that teachers see the wider curriculum as a way of supporting curiosity and developing wider skills.

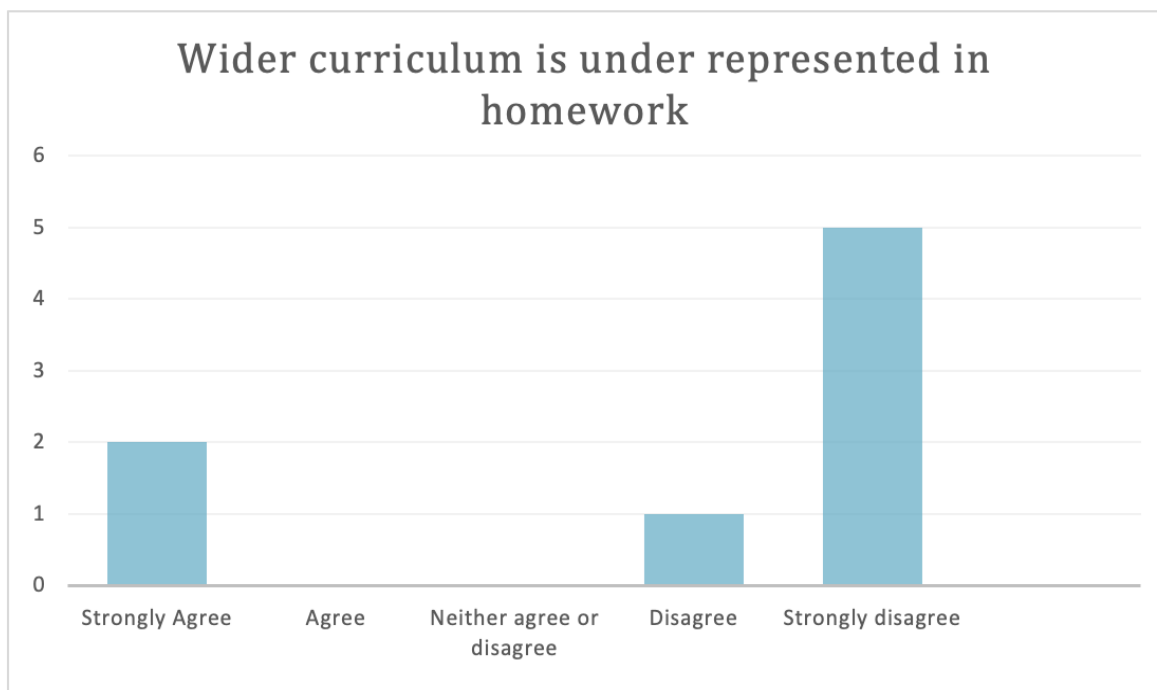


Figure 4. A bar graph showing teachers' opinions on the representation of the wider curriculum in homework. From question 7.

Finally, when considering the effect of homework on their workload, the majority of teachers identified homework as having some negative impact. This contrasted with the Headteacher's interview where interestingly they perceived homework to add no additional pressure to teachers' workload.

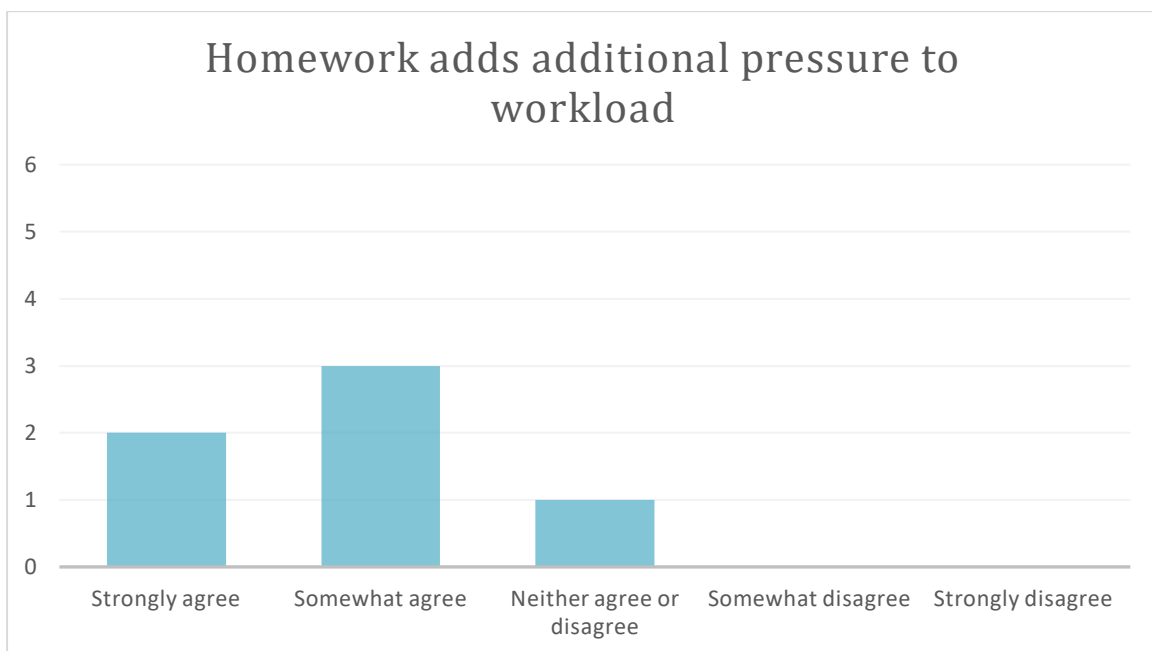


Figure 5. A bar graph showing teachers' perspectives on the contribution of homework to their workload. From question 10.

5. Discussion

This section will discuss the relevance of the findings and how they link to the existing literature considering the accessibility of homework as a central theme.

A core theme from the findings centred around homework having a clear purpose. The Headteacher identified personalised homework, aiming to target specific gaps in children's learning as purposeful. Although other teachers identified with this for addressing specific

gaps in learning, it was not a popular answer when considering the purpose of homework. One reason for this may be the additional pressure that personalised homework would add to teachers' workload, something which the research data highlights as an issue shown in Figure 5, illustrating how most of the teachers identified homework as a contributing factor to their workload. Therefore, homework monitoring could end up being delegated to additional adults (Medwell and Wray, 2019) and its aim to close gaps in learning may not be as effective, as teachers would have little involvement in monitoring homework progress. However, data shows that regardless, teachers do not perceive homework as an accurate reflection of attainment. For teachers, amplified levels of parental involvement could make identifying gaps in learning more challenging as children's true understanding is obscured, thus homework to support learning becomes ineffective (Pressman *et al*, 2015).

However, one advantage of personalised homework is its potential to meet the needs of the individual. For children with SEND, individualised homework allows teachers to plan around their needs and consider the tools available to support them at home. As considered in the SEND code of practice (2015), this would not only be good practice for children with additional needs but for every child. Therefore, the accessibility of homework is key to its impact. It could be argued that in the same way, a child's work is differentiated in school to meet their needs, homework should mirror this practice and offer the child the opportunity to work at their own level and work with some autonomy. In addition to this, it is important to recognise that no child is the same and will have different needs. Smith, Critten and Vardill (2020) consider for children with SEND, working on social skills may be as beneficial to their development as standard academic homework. Moreover, setting standardised homework that may be beyond the level of the child could affect their confidence and

reinforce negative attitudes towards homework. Setting personalised homework would allow the teacher to understand barriers (EEF, 2021), and consider the individual. However, as the literature shows, the demand to raise reading standards and its wider benefits will ensure reading remains a central homework task. McGeown *et al* (2015) note a child's confidence is important for reading success. Therefore, building confidence with accessible and personalised homework could support reading standards and maintain confidence. Furthermore, using homework as a tool to build confidence, with the right 'parental stage setting' (Harris, 2014), could benefit classroom learning ensuring homework is a helpful tool giving children the facility to practice their skills.

Nevertheless, it is important to ensure that the 'parental stage setting' is done in the right way and to recognise that parents are not their child's teacher. This means ensuring that when parents step in to support their child they do not, in effect, do the homework themselves to allow teachers to see what children can do independently. The phonics and early reading lead expressed how the impact of COVID-19 amplified the effect of ill-placed parental support. They discussed how parents were reporting that children had knowledge that had not yet been covered and the negative impact of this on their long-term progress, had the school used homework as solid progression data. Parental feelings of academic pressure for their child to succeed may be a reason for this as teachers commented on parents' eagerness to be able to intervene in school work earlier than was necessary. However, another reason may simply be to prevent distress for children who do not understand difficult homework and minimise family tensions as a result of inaccessible tasks (Carmichael and MacDonald, 2016; Ofsted, 2018).

Furthermore, data indicates that teachers could not determine whether homework has a positive effect on pupils suggesting that it 'might or might not'. This could highlight inequalities in the benefits of homework illustrating how it offers advantage to some children more than others. Therefore, it could be concluded that for children with positive parental involvement and for whom the homework is set at an appropriate level, homework helps their learning allowing them to flourish and thrive from the reinforcement and consolidation that homework offers. Whereas for children who do not have the same support and struggle, homework may ultimately affect their confidence and overall mental health (Carmichael and MacDonald, 2016; Goodhall and Johnston-Wilder, 2015; Ofsted, 2017; Pressman *et al* 2015, Tsang, Yan-Yan Dang and Moorhouse, 2022; Sylva, 2023; Jaynes, 2012). Moreover, poorly designed and unpurposeful homework may widen the attainment gap (Sayers *et al*, 2022), making classroom learning more challenging for some pupils. This furthers the argument for accessible and relatable homework that children can complete independently and with confidence.

One way of ensuring homework is accessible is, where possible, relating learning to children's interests. Peacock (2016) highlights how children should be encouraged to explore their interests and with data, highlighting how homework has the potential to detract from family time, drawing on children's interests is a positive way to naturally integrate homework into family life. Most teachers identified developing wider skills and a curiosity for learning as what they perceive the main purpose of homework should be. Although academic demands do not always allow for this. Combining the child's interests with academic content could allow children to turn 'homework' into 'home fun' as Rink *et al* (2010, cited in Driscoll and Linker, 2022) discuss as being refreshing and effective for

engagement. Furthermore, integrating the child's interests could help to overcome embedded negative associations with homework. If children see homework as an extension of their interest and curiosity, subsequent tasks are more likely to be enjoyable and have an inbuilt strong foundation. However, for this to have the greatest effect, communication of intent with parents is important. As (Sylva *et al*, 2004; Bladen, 2006) point out, parents may have negative associations with education themselves which could create unconscious barriers for their children to see homework positively and learning as a lifelong process. Ensuring parents have a clear idea of the objective behind homework could ensure that unrealistic expectations and academic pressure are lessened and mental health challenges and family tensions, as a result of homework are minimised.

Both data and literature show that opportunities to build connections between school and home are a key advantage to homework. As evidenced in the findings, using an online learning journal to communicate with parents allows for a shared learning experience and an opportunity for parents to relay concerns. Moreover, for children with SEND, tasks that facilitate different ways of recording, work such as through video, could promote engagement. With reading as a central priority for teachers, using online platforms could also encourage children to explore literature in different ways. Encouraging children to use different mediums, such as drama and the creative arts to explore learning using an online platform, would be a positive way of engaging children in typically more challenging topics. This would also support with making homework more accessible. Moreover, using online learning journals for homework facilitates peer support to minimise reliance on adults whilst also supporting the development of softer skills, such as independence that teachers view as important (See Figure 1) (Holland *et al*, 2021; Davidovich and Yavich, 2017). Additionally,

Rou and Yunus (2020) suggest that for older children, having an online space to discuss homework, (in this study particularly reading) encourages engagement and enjoyment of reading, particularly as engagement in reading for older children may be negatively impacted by social pressures and trends. However, it should be considered how reliance on technology may negatively affect some families. Arnold (2021) discusses how families do not always have access to the right technology and need adaptations to ensure their needs are met and inequalities are addressed. Data illustrates the possibility of this in practice, with teachers providing resources for larger projects where possible.

Although reading does not have to be done online to be enjoyable, data highlights that reading from an early age and reading regularly is advised to lay foundations to support reading for pleasure as children get older. The impact of this is supported by DfE (2012) research on 'reading for pleasure', noting a positive relationship between reading frequency, enjoyment, and attainment (Clark, 2011; Clark and Douglas, 2011). Additionally, some of the most positive outcomes of homework initiatives have come from those where parents are encouraged to read with their children (Jeynes, 2012). Furthermore, with positive relationships existing between reading and mental well-being, placing reading centrally within homework could support overall well-being and learning by unlocking the wealth of knowledge found in books, whilst ensuring parents can play a role in their child's learning.

6. Conclusion and Implications for Practice

This study shows how teachers' perspectives on homework are not solely aimed towards academic progression but rather to enable children to explore and consolidate learning and harness curiosity. However, arguably the most significant finding and implication of this research is the need for accessibility of homework to ensure that it can be a useful tool for teachers.

This project highlights that homework is not and should not be considered a 'one size fits all' approach. In synthesis with literature, findings from this research suggest that a more personalised approach to homework would be beneficial to ensure that every child can appropriately access work independently and that teachers recognise barriers (Syla, 2023), for homework to have maximum efficiency. Furthermore, if learning in the classroom is child led the same should apply to homework tasks to enable children to explore learning as homework is an extension of classroom learning. Although some adult support will be necessary to provide the scaffold for children of a 'more knowledgeable other' (Vygotsky, 1978), homework should ultimately mirror the adaptive child-led learning offered in school. Giving children autonomy over their learning, ensures that homework becomes more than a correct answer on a spelling test and rather about teaching children independence, responsibility, and time management in duality (Davidovich and Yavich, 2017; Holland *et al*, 2021), to allow them to see the purpose homework beyond school.

Finally, it is important to recognise as Purdy and McClelland (2021) point out that 'Teachers don't just teach subjects they teach children' (p.384), therefore homework should reflect this.

As one teacher commented in the questionnaire:

“Setting laborious tasks in a book inevitably leads to tears!” [Questionnaire response, 22nd March 2023]

Homework should not be something contributing to poor mental wellbeing, but rather be an exciting part of education, for the children to show their independence and explore learning for themselves. As data highlights, teachers' perspectives on homework do not emphasise its purpose for academic advancement but rather as a supporting tool for learning therefore educators should strive to ensure that homework is no longer a word filled with dread. To support this, more training could be made available to teachers to support in setting purposeful and effective homework, that positively affects both the child and them as practitioners.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The questionnaire given to teachers:

Teachers perspectives on homework- Dissertation survey

Start of Block: Default Question Block

Q1 Do you consent to your data being used in research from this survey?

- No (1)
- Yes (2)

Skip To: End of Survey if Do you consent to your data being used in research from this survey? = No

Q2 Which key stage do you teach?

- Nursery/EYFS (1)
- KS1 (2)
- Lower KS2 (3)
- Upper KS2 (4)
-

Q3 How useful do you feel that homework is?

Not at all
useful

Slightly
useful

Moderately
useful

Very
useful

Extremely
useful

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

How useful do you feel that homework is? ()

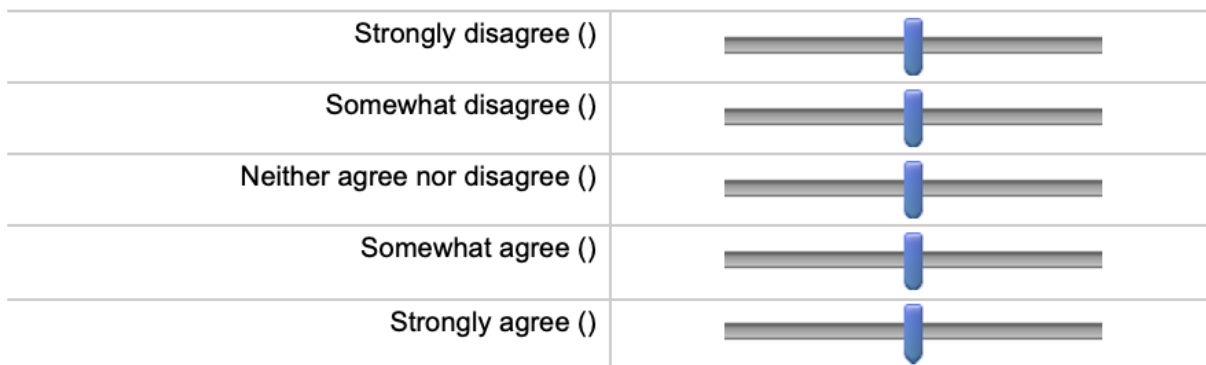


Q5 Please expand on the above. Is there any particular reason?

Q4 What homework do you typically set for your class in a week?

Q7 Wider curriculum subjects are underrepresented in homework tasks.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100



Q8 Which of these statements best represents what you think homework should be for.

- Homework should be to advance academic progress (1)
- Homework should be to consolidate learning (2)
- Homework should develop weaker areas of learning (3)
- Homework should be about children applying learning (4)
- Homework should be about developing wider skills and curiosity for learning (5)
- Other (6)

Skip To: Q9 if Which of these statements best represents what you think homework should be for. = Other

Q9 If you answered 'other' please explain further

Q10 Do you feel that homework is effective in giving you an accurate reflection of the children's ability?

- Not effective at all (1)
 - Slightly effective (2)
 - Moderately effective (3)
 - Very effective (4)
 - Extremely effective (5)
-

Q10 Setting homework adds additional pressure to your workload.

- Strongly disagree (1)
 - Somewhat disagree (2)
 - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
 - Somewhat agree (4)
 - Strongly agree (5)
-

Q11 What do you think is the most important 'homework' would be for children to do to support their learning?

Q13 Do you feel that homework has a positive impact on pupils?

Definitely not	Probably not	Might or might not	Probably yes	Definitely yes						
0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

Click to write Choice 1 ()



End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix 2: Consent form sent to teachers. After receiving responses from questionnaires, permission was sought from the Phonics and early reading to be interviewed as well.

Dear Teachers,

As you may be aware I am a final year student teacher from York St John University currently in the process of trying to gather data for my dissertation. My research aims to investigate the attitudes and perspectives towards homework, and I would be grateful for your participation if possible. As a part of my study, I will be sending out a survey to teachers across the school and will conduct a short semi structured interview with the Head Teacher.

Response to the survey, although appreciated is not compulsory and there is no obligation for your participation. If your data from the survey is used in the study, please be assured that data will be handled in line with GDPR policy and stored securely with limited access.

Please sign here if you have read the above and tick the box below if you agree to your data being used in the study.

I have read the above information:

Signed:

I agree to have my data used in the study and understand it will be anonymised.

Yours Faithfully,
Ruth Crompton

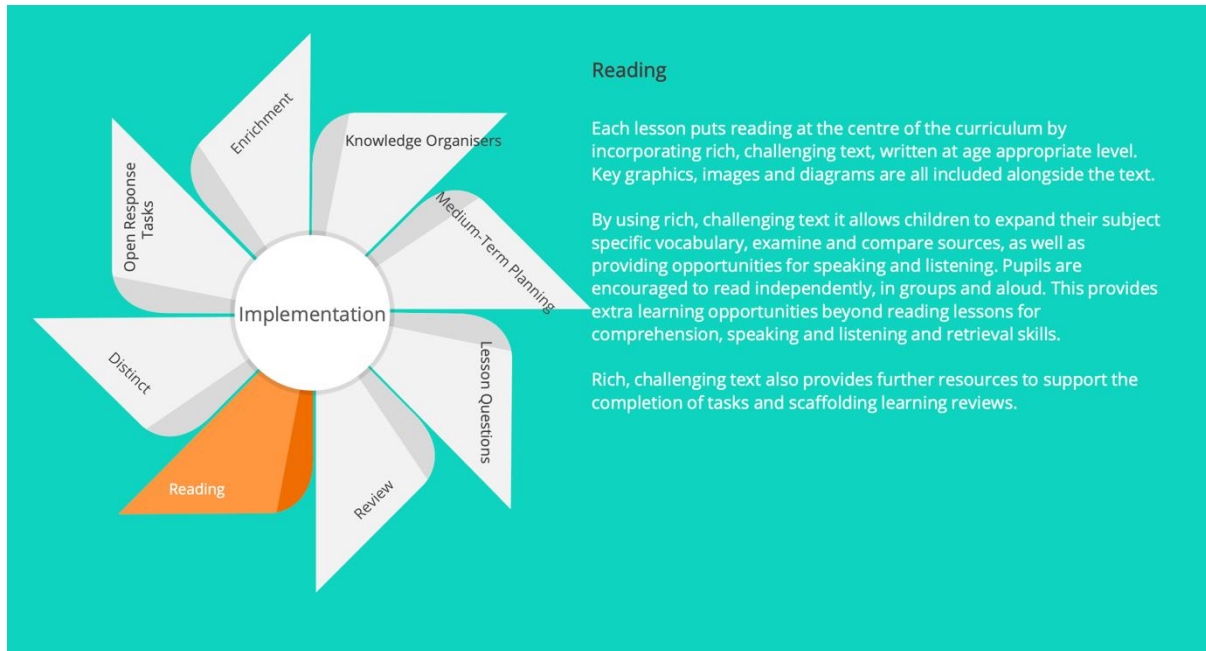
Appendix 3: A table from Driscoll and Linker, (2022), illustrating different online apps that could promote ‘home fun’ rather than ‘homework’.

Table 2. Home Fun Technology Apps

Technology Apps			
Name	Cost	Grade Level	Application
Seesaw	Seesaw Free or Seesaw Plus \$120	K–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers can post activities, announcements and assignments for students to complete Option for both teachers and students to use photos, videos, drawings, text, Portable Document Format files, and shared links User friendly and teachers can share activities with other teachers See Figure 4 Source: https://web.seesaw.me/activities
QR codes	Free	K–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy for students to scan and view the activity on phone or tablet Can be placed on parent newsletters or sent out through email Can link to other documents and forms Source: https://www.qrcode-monkey.com
Google Forms	Free	6–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows teachers to ask questions, add pictures, and customize Easy to gather and export data to a Google Sheet Source: https://zapier.com/learn/google-sheets/how-to-use-google-forms/
Padlet	Free or Padlet Pro \$96/year	6–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers a digital place for teachers and students to post Posts can include images, links, videos and documents, all collated on a "wall" that can be made public or private. Source: https://www.techlearning.com/how-to/what-is-padlet-and-how-does-it-work-for-teachers-and-students
Bitmoji Classroom	Free	K–6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bitmoji Classroom is a combination of the Bitmoji App, Google documents, and YouTube videos or web links. Teachers create an interactive slide or slideshow that can be published and sent out to students to complete. The Bitmoji Classroom works in combination with Seesaw as well. See Figures 1 and 2 Resource: https://momentousinstitute.org/blog/how-we-created-a-bitmoji-classroom
Flippity	Free	K–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create scavenger hunts, randomizers, matching games, and flash cards Resource: https://www.flippity.net/
Flipgrid	Free	K–12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and students can send and post short videos to foster a discussion Responses can be hidden from participants in class or open for everyone to see. Resource: https://info.flipgrid.com/

Appendix 4: Link and Screenshots from the school's curriculum policy

[https://\[redacted\]/sites/default/files/uploads/media/files/delivering-the-curriculum-policy-2022-23_2.pdf](https://[redacted]/sites/default/files/uploads/media/files/delivering-the-curriculum-policy-2022-23_2.pdf)



Homework

Teachers set challenging homework appropriate for the age of the children that consolidates learning, deepens understanding and prepares pupils for work to come. A homework display in each Key Stage will be updated regularly to celebrate home learning.

The majority of homework will be set on the Google Classroom platform.

Within each stage homework consists of:

- Nursery:
 - New topic related creative homework.
 - Nursery Rhymes.
- Reception:
 - Phonics.
 - New topic related creative homework.
 - Reading – GoRead.
- Key Stage 1:
 - Daily Reading recorded on GoRead.
 - Spelling Activity/Spelling Shed.
 - Mathematics Skills.
- Key stage 2:
 - Daily reading recorded on GoRead.
 - Spelling activities (Fortnightly).
 - Homework task set by class teacher.
 - TT Rockstars and Spelling Shed.

Appendix 5: Semi-structured interview questions

Headteacher Interview Questions:

1. How does the homework expectation differ from EYFS to Key Stage 2?
2. How much time do you think children should be spending on homework?
3. As a Headteacher what do you believe the purpose of homework should be?
4. What do you feel the drawbacks of homework are?
5. Which homework gets the best overall interaction?
6. Why did you change your homework policy?
7. Do you feel that there are any areas of the curriculum that are underrepresented in homework?
8. What level of homework involvement do you expect from parents?

Phonics and early reading lead questions:

1. I understand that homework in EYFS and KS1 is different to the rest of the school. Can you explain the structure of homework to me in the early years?
2. Is there anything that you would say that children can do necessarily without structured parental support?
3. Why do you place more emphasis on phonics and reading in the early years?
4. In your experience of year groups across the school, would you say ideas about reading and phonics transfer throughout into key stage one and beyond?
5. Do you believe that if you placed emphasis on other types of homework the children would be as strong going through the rest of school?
6. What are the typical homework tasks you think are the most beneficial when considering the whole school and what do you think it is for?
7. Would you say you've noticed misconceptions arise from home support or do you think this is not as common as people think?
8. Do you feel that children are independent with their own learning for homework?
9. How do you think parents perceive homework in early years as school starters?
10. We are in an affluent area; do you think this would be the same in more deprived areas?
11. How do you perceive homework to support attainment and your assessment of attainment?
12. What do you think the drawbacks are of homework?
13. How do you see reading and phonics supporting children's independent learning further through school?