

# NATIONAL HOMEWORK POLICY

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MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT





# Objectives

The purpose of this policy is to identify meaningful understandings and practices of homework with the aim of assisting all involved in the educational learning process by offering direction regarding meaningful homework that takes into account the different needs of all the learners. Research has shown that if homework is assigned in a meaningful manner, in different degrees and quantities in relation to year of schooling, and in relation to the learning needs of students, it will have positive benefits to the learning process. The expectations of homework should be in line with the values of diversity, equity, and social justice as outlined in the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024. Homework should not interfere with or undermine co-curricular activities including those of a social nature. It is crucial that learners are given a timely opportunity to be involved in meaningful leisure activities.

# Scope

The policy is meant to be relevant for early years to end of secondary.

Normally the policy will be reviewed every five years.

This policy is meant to be incorporated as part of each school yearly development plan.

# Definitions

## **Homework:**

Teacher-assigned and teacher-monitored work that students are asked to do outside of the classroom context, related to and supportive of the learning that takes place in school. Homework can be of various formats including play.

## **Goals of homework:**

To consolidate or reinforce classroom teaching and learning, to assist in the process of formative assessment, to assist teachers in determining and revising their planning, to assist in the process of creating partnerships with home, to lead to more educational success.

## **Meaningful homework:**

Work that is related to the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom instead of focusing on material not yet dealt with in class; work that is oriented toward a stress-free learning environment and hence should not overwhelm the students in terms of content or time; work that encourages authentic and organic forms of learning that relate to students interests and needs, and advances 21 century skills and dispositions (e.g., critical thinking, cooperation, conflict resolution, communication skills, honesty and integrity, open-mindedness, diversity and inclusion, critical media literacy, creativity, independent learning, responsible decision making etc.). Meaningful homework entails meaningful feedback from teachers rather than homework being used as a basis for summative assessment.

## **Parental involvement:**

The support and understanding that parents/guardians can offer to those under their care in order for the learners to make the homework a meaningful and a stress-free experience.

## **Learner:**

The student who gradually and positively learns in a variety of ways as he or she is offered possibilities to learn new attitudes, values, skills, behaviours etc.

## **Student needs:**

Students as unique individuals with different social and cultural histories have differing learning needs; it is also important to take into account students' genuine interests when considering their needs. Hence it is imperative to have communication with students.

## **Play:**

While play comes in different forms, there are three essential qualities of play: freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation, and personal direction. All three qualities are intrinsically related to the nature of education and meaningful engagement. Unfortunately, play has not been given the central and proper place it deserves

in education institutions. Recent developments in neuroscience has strongly established the importance of play for the development of both mind and body and the emotions. It decreases attention deficits and hyperactivity. Active play increases motivation, concentration and problem solving. It increases not only overall human development but also cognitive development, communication, and self-esteem. Hence it is imperative not only to include play as part of the normal activities in schools but also as part of homework.

**Quality:**

Refers to the nature of the homework given in relation to the qualities of meaningful homework, as well as student level and needs; teachers need to consider the possibility of giving a variety of homework in terms of difficulty and complexity levels to accommodate students' different needs.

**Quantity:**

Refers to the amount of the homework given in relation to the qualities of meaningful homework, as well as student level and needs; teachers need to consider the possibility of giving less homework in order to offer more deep and meaningful feedback.

**Homework time:**

The time to complete the homework given may vary according to each context; it can be done over a short or longer period of time.

**Co-curricular activities:**

Activities, in or outside of schools, that students engage in and are not officially part of the formal syllabus/curriculum. It is crucial for assigned homework not to diminish the possibility of students engaging in meaningful co-curricular activities; to avoid the co-curricular/homework binary it is helpful to create links between the two whenever possible.

**Different impacts of homework:**

The positive impacts of meaningful homework increases as students move to higher grades/levels/years. Homework that adds value to the learning experience increases the possibility of achieving the stated goals of homework. Negative impacts of homework that need to be avoided include: disengagement of students from meaningful learning, marginalization of students, tensions between teachers and students and parents, stress, and lack of involvement in co-curricular activities.

# Policy

## *4.1 Effective homework /quality of homework assignments*

Homework assignments that increase the effectiveness and quality of homework include:

- work that is directly related to what has already been explained and/or practiced in class
- work that gives students the opportunity to practice what they have already learnt in class by engaging in activities that help them understand more deeply the content or practice procedures they have been introduced to in class
- work that gives students the opportunity to apply what they have already learnt in class
- work that offers students the opportunity to further explore their interests in relation to what has already been taught in class
- work that encourages students to be creative and take risks or to freely explore a topic
- work that allows students in the last 3 years of secondary school, to benefit from homework that encourages them to prepare for a topic that will be explored in class; this will assist students to identify what they already know about the topic or read about the topic prior to it being introduced in class
- work that supports the language development of Maltese, English and other languages



## 4.2 Diversity of homework; choice of homework

Considering the different learning needs of students, homework assignments may need to vary. It is also helpful to give students some choice in homework tasks to encourage them to have more ownership of their learning.

There are three major kinds of meaningful homework assignments:

- 1 Practice homework:**  
Work that reviews and reinforces skills, concepts, dispositions and values taught in class; the more the students understand what they have learnt, the more effective the homework will be.
- 2 Extension homework:**  
Work that assists students to explore and refine their learning by applying what they have learnt through problem solving, and thinking creatively and critically; it helps students make connections between what they have learnt and the real world.
- 3 Preparation homework:**  
work that prepares students in a general manner for a forthcoming lesson or topic. This is effective for the last three years of secondary schools. It will assist students to identify their prior knowledge and bring their life experiences as they relate to the topic at hand. Preparation homework is NOT meant to substitute a lesson or class.

With students that have access to technology, homework can be enhanced through the use of technology. It is also helpful to allow students to form groups to do homework. It may also be possible to hold such groups in school after regular school hours.

### 4.3 Reporting of homework

Homework is meant to be part of formative rather than summative assessment; that is, homework is part of assessment for learning and not assessment of learning. Homework should not be included in report cards since homework is primarily meant to support learning that has taken place in class. If students regularly miss homework, every case needs to be investigated on the basis of its context; it is important that students take responsibility to complete homework.

### 4.4 Timing, scheduling, and quantity of homework

**kindergarten:** No homework should be assigned although kindergarten educators may provide and recommend resources to support families in early learning activities (playing, talking, and reading together). It is important to consider that parental involvement increases student achievement. Parents can be involved by reading with their children, and involving their children in sports and cultural activities.



**years 1-2:** At this level reading to and/or with children on a daily basis in one's mother tongue increases student achievement. The major focus of homework should be on reading and interactive activities including play. By end of year 2 the amount of homework should not exceed more than 20 minutes per day.



**years 3-6:** By year 3, the amount of homework should not exceed more than 30 minutes per day. Independent homework should be introduced and should not exceed more than 45 minutes per day by grade 6. Gradual increment in the amount of homework is advisable.



**years 7-8:** While homework in these years can contribute to an increase in student achievement, the total amount of homework should not exceed one hour per day. It is crucial that assigned homework is well planned and coordinated between teachers of different subjects.



**years 9-11:** While homework in these years contributes to an increase in student achievement, the total amount of homework should not exceed 8 hours per week. It is crucial that assigned homework is well planned and coordinated between teachers of different subjects. It is also advisable that for student that move to year 9 homework demands should be increased gradually to minimize stress.

### *4.5 Homework during extended absences*

Although homework alone cannot compensate for missed classroom teaching, it is helpful in keeping the absentee students partially engaged with the classroom environment. In these situations, students from years 7-8 and years 9-11 who face extended absences are recommended to be in touch with the teacher regarding the missed work in order to adequately prepare for various assessments once they return to class. These students may also be offered extensions for missed assignments. In this regard it is crucial that families and/or guardians communicate with school and that the school cooperates with families and/or guardians. The amount of extra time allotted to absentee students will be determined on an individual basis. Students who acquire the skills to complete the homework independently, become lifelong learners. Even though teachers are not required to provide detailed homework assignments for students with extended absences (3 or more days), it is helpful to explore alternative possibilities that may be helpful to students.

The following are helpful and recommended guidelines that can assist with extended absences:

- Parents/guardians are expected to contact the head of school to inform them of any reason students miss class time beyond the school holidays
- Continuous and frequent communications between parents/guardians and schools in order to assist the learning of the student
- If students are aware of an impending long absentee, they should speak to the teacher and request homework, class notes, and assignments if applicable
- Teachers can also compile work that is missed and send/email it to the student as regularly as possible
- If the extended absentee has been unexpected (extenuating circumstances such as sudden illness or serious family issues), teachers can assign a student mediator who can inform the absentee students of the required work on a weekly basis. For the years 1-2, students are encouraged to form a buddy system and call the designated buddy (or parents/guardians of absentee students call the parents/guardians of the buddy) to obtain assignments when absent
- Learners before year 3 are encouraged to practice the missed lessons with their parents/guardians as well as to maintain a journal or picture log of their time away from the school
- Through the need to inform students of the homework missed during extended absences, teachers can enhance communication with students' families and ensure effective communication of homework expectations.





## 4.6 Roles and Responsibilities

### **School Administration**

The roles and responsibilities of the school administration in relation to homework include:

- Foster lifelong learning and connecting families with kindergarten educators, teachers, and learning support educators, and students and assist in maintaining teacher/parent(guardian) partnership on homework
- Ensure homework policy is enacted in line with the needs of the students and the spirit of the policy
- Provide a copy of the homework policy to guardians/parents and informing them of the ensuing homework expectations
- Recommend that parents/guardians of students in years 1-6 explain the homework policy to the children to ensure clear understanding of expectations
- Offer support to teachers in terms of implementation of the homework guidelines
- Provide periodic review of school homework guidelines
- Support co-curricular activities for students in line with their assigned homework
- Identify opportunities for students to receive homework support at school including homework clubs, tutoring sessions, and after school hours
- Provide parent/guardian-homework workshops to help them learn strategies and techniques that will assist students with their homework
- Assist with school-home communications in the case of extended absences from schools to ensure appropriate homework is assigned

### **Kindergarten Educators and Teachers**

The roles and responsibilities of teachers in relation to homework include:

- Equip students with the skills to engage in real-life problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and meaningful homework
- Include different, challenging, and meaningful activities in the homework to ensure the inclusion of students with differing abilities, including play activities
- Offer practical and meaningful feedback as well as in-depth assessment of homework along with needed support
- Assist students to develop organizational and time-management skills by assigning particular kinds of homework
- Engage the parents of younger learners in students' homework activities as active partners
- Develop strategies to effectively communicate the expectations of the teacher regarding the purpose of homework assignments to students
- Review and assess homework assignments and return them in a timely manner
- Identify the objectives of the homework and communicate the short-term and long-term goals of homework to both parents and students; ensure parents know how to communicate with teachers or school administrators about potential homework problems
- Periodically discuss with students and their parents/guardians the student's academic progress, including performance on homework assignments
- Develop individual practices that are consistent with the goals of the curriculum for students that exhibit difficulty in completing class-assigned homework
- Develop criteria or rubric based on which the homework is to be evaluated and communicate a make-up strategy for students who submitted incomplete homework
- Allow for in-class study groups in order to address difficulties students face in relation to homework

### **Learning Support Educators**

The role of the LSE is to support the work already initiated by teachers. For example, encourage learners and parents to understand the various kinds and possibilities of homework, assist in in-class study groups re: homework and support the roles carried out by teachers, and support strategies adopted by teachers re: homework.

### **Students**

The roles and responsibilities of students in relation to homework include:

- Follow-up on the feedback provided by the teacher on their homework
- Seek clarification from the teacher if a particular assignment is not clear
- Record their homework due dates and other important information in a notebook or planner
- Take increasing responsibility, especially if they are absent from class and find out about the work they missed in class
- Participate in homework groups if they are available in the school

## Family

The roles and responsibilities of the family in relation to homework include:

- Develop a positive and productive approach to homework
- Read the homework alongside students in early years to ensure clear understanding, and when applicable involve the students in learning opportunities during every day activities at home
- Develop a close relationship with teachers to be able to identify concerns regarding the students' homework, and when needed, discuss teachers' feedback on homework
- Participate in workshops provided by the school to learn strategies and techniques that can be of help in dealing with students' homework
- Offer feedback to teachers regarding both the quality and quantity of homework
- Assist students to strike a balance between homework, family time, and recreational activities
- Offer assistance to children whose first language is different from the language of teaching by discussing the homework in the student's first language
- Take on a supervisory role and provide partial assistance to students instead of doing the assignment for them
- Provide a suitable place for the students to complete their homework; for younger learners it might be helpful to assign a particular time to the homework
- Parents and guardians are encouraged to assist their children, even when homework is not provided, by reading to/with them, and get their children involved in activities such as sports, crafts and cultural activities
- Participate in homework groups if they are available in the school