



# Informing Parents

Parent Information Newsletter: Term 4 ♦ Week 2 ♦ Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006

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## Homework is changing at Narrabri West!

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### **Introduction:**

Each school develops its own homework policy. Encouragement and support from parents helps students to have a positive, productive approach to homework.

### **Why is homework so important?**

Homework bridges the gap between learning at school and learning at home. It reinforces work done in class. It helps develop skills such as research and time management.

Homework helps to establish the habits of study, concentration and self discipline. Parents have the opportunity to see the progress of their child. Homework provides challenges and stimulus to gifted and talented children.

The basic rules of homework are that it:

- is appropriate for each student's age and ability
- takes into account students' other commitments, such as sport and home responsibilities
- takes into account technology such as email and the Internet so that students without access are not disadvantaged.

### **What can parents/caregivers do to help?**

- Take an active interest in your child's homework.
- Support your child in setting aside time each day for homework.
- Provide a dedicated place for homework and study if possible.
- Assist teachers to monitor homework by signing completed work if requested and be aware of the amount of homework set.
- Communicate with teachers any concerns about the nature of homework or your child's approach to homework.
- Encourage your children to read and take an interest in current events.
- Alert the school to any domestic circumstances or extra curricular activities which may need to be taken into consideration when homework is being set or marked.

### **How homework is changing at Narrabri West: The Homework Grid**

At Narrabri West we are trialling a change in the way we do homework. This trial of the **Homework Grid** will involve classes in Stages 1, 2 and 3 and will commence in Term 4 2006.

### **Why the Change?**

Homework today has divided support. Some families want more structured written tasks because they feel that this will prepare their children for high school and some families want none because they are fed up with the tensions that homework causes in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons we have heard from parents in support of homework over the years:

1. It helps me to know what my child is doing in class.
2. They have a great deal of homework in high school and we need to prepare them for it.
3. It teaches them good study habits.

Here are a few statements parents have made against homework:

1. They get no time to play after school.
2. My child doesn't know what to do and neither do I.
3. This "New Maths" is so frustrating. I can't help my child.
4. It causes fights in our household.
5. My child works very hard all day just to complete tasks. Then they have to come home and do the same all over again.

What we have heard teachers say about homework:

1. We only set homework because parents demand it.
2. Parents think we are 'slack' if we don't set homework.
3. Homework causes more problems than good.
4. If homework is going to cause disruption and argument, it is okay not to do it.

We are sure there are more you could add to all of these categories. However, the simple fact is that children, employment requirements and families have changed and we need to review our practices.

This structure that we are trialling is being used successfully in a growing number of schools across Australia. Narrabri West is at all times reviewing our practices and an important feature we are encouraging in our school is a positive attitude to change. We need to be a school community that not only welcomes innovation, but encourages it.

This new approach is NOT a means of avoiding homework. In fact, more homework will often be done under this system.

We know that families have busy lives. Parents work and students have many after school commitments. We feel that students need to be rewarded for the informal and formal learning they pursue outside school hours. This is our way of acknowledging these as being essential to their healthy overall development as unique individuals. Family life, real life experiences and children's extra activities outside of school contribute greatly to a child's learning and development.

The Homework Grid is based on an idea developed by Perth educator, Ian Lillico, a leader in the field of education. It broadens the traditional idea of homework. The grid is about balance - a balance between school and home and formal and informal learning. We hope that the trial of this approach this year will be a success and we urge you to tell us what you think about the Homework Grid.

### **How Does it Work?**

The grid contains compulsory and optional learning tasks for the fortnight and each of these is explained in greater detail with this information newsletter. Because learning opportunities are all around and can happen at any time (breakfast, during family outings, shopping, visiting friends and family, cooking), we have also included with this information some suggestions you can use to continue to take advantage of those valuable learning opportunities.

### **What does the Homework Grid look like?**

The grid is issued on a weekly basis in Stage 1 and fortnightly basis for Stages 2 and 3. Some sections of the grid are compulsory - Reading, Housework, Spelling and Maths - the students must complete activities within them each fortnight. There will be fewer activities in the Stage 1 grid than in the Stage 2 and 3 grids. Some sections are optional - students may choose to complete these sections, although it is expected that something from each cell of the grid would be covered at the end of the homework cycle. There will be different activities each week (Stage 1) and fortnight (Stage 2 and 3). The spelling and maths activities will be selected from the examples included later in this newsletter.

- Each grid sector requires a minimum of 10 minutes work over the week (Stage 1) and fortnight (Stage 2 and 3). The suggested times are *minimum*. There is

absolutely no problem with students spending more time in some sections if they are interested in them.

- Two sections are to be done nightly –
  - Reading, or being read to;
  - Housework
- Some sectors could be specific. Others could be more open-ended to allow choice for students.
- Some of the sections will be 'controlled' by teachers – assignments etc - and some will be controlled by parents, e.g. you can stipulate what housework you want them to do!
- Each week (Stage 1) and fortnight (Stage 2 and 3), the grids will be checked, any work requiring marking will be marked or checked and students will be asked to share their experiences.

Parents/Adults:

- Use the particular activities to interact with your child.
- Sign to verify that the work has been done.
- Set extension work if you feel that this is appropriate.

Students:

- Complete the grid within the week / fortnight.
- Record the specific times, work completed etc on the grid.
- Give some feedback to the class on some of the sectors.

Teachers:

- Plan the grid to suit the tasks of the unit/s they are teaching that term.
- Check the completed grid every week / fortnight.
- Check regularly on what has been completed the night before, just to ensure that students are using good time-management skills.
- Use the grid & other activities in class to develop information and study skills in students.

### **Different Sections of the Homework Grid: What do they mean?**

There are different sections on the Homework Grid.

#### **\* Reading (Compulsory)**

We know that you expect students to read on a regular basis. It is the only way that children can become more confident and fluent, increase their vocabulary and practise using the patterns of written language. It is important to encourage your child to read every night.

#### **\* Housework (Compulsory)**

We know that having time to be together as a family, helping to keep the house tidy and enjoying meals together is important. It is important that students develop a work ethic, committing to household tasks, and contribute in a meaningful way to family life; helping around the house, cleaning and cooking, helping with the washing, shopping and various other tasks helps them become responsible household members with valuable life skills. Simply list

household tasks completed by your child during the week as they practise being a household helper.

### \* Spelling (Compulsory)

Students should be involved in spelling activities at least four times a week to ensure they recall their words. Some simple and fun ways to learn spelling are included at the end of this newsletter. Use these ideas to help your child to learn their words.

### \* Maths (Compulsory)

Maths is all around us. Just about every occasion or event can be linked to maths. Your teacher may indicate a particular maths activity to complete or number facts to practise during the week, or you may wish to try one of the suggested activities below:

- Estimate and count how many steps to the letter box from the door, compare with Mum and Dads - How many more, how many less?
- Count how many lights in the house – How many more/ less than the number of switches?
- Read and record the time on digital and analogue clocks
- Measure out ingredients for cooking – weight, volume
- Set the table with one plate, knife, fork and cup for each person in the family
- Find different 3D shapes in the cupboard and fridge – cans, boxes, ice-cream cones, oranges/ apples
- Estimate and check how many cans in the kitchen, sort into groups
- Name the shapes found in tiles in the kitchen or bathroom, draw the pattern
- Add the digits in your phone number and other people's phone numbers
- Find and record friend's and family's birthdays on a calendar
- Share portions of food evenly among the family – e.g. cutting a cake, sharing lollies
- Add up coins in a purse or wallet
- Estimate and weigh items in the kitchen
- Practise Number Facts on the way to school
- Practise Number Patterns on the way to school
- Count how many commercials during a T.V. program
- Count how many pairs of socks, work out how many altogether, count how many shoes, how many more/less?
- Measure how many hand-spans long is your bed, how many wide, work out the difference, measure using feet
- Name the days of week and months of the year
- Count how many letters in the days of the week and add them together, which day has the most letters in its name?
- Add up the digits on your car's number plate
- Add up the digits showing on the odometer, look at and say the numbers on the speedometer
- Count your toys and group them by the way they look or feel
- Read aloud the page numbers of a big book
- Make a shopping list of items that are almost empty in the fridge
- Find things in your home that are taller/shorter/thinner/about the same height as you.
- Draw your family standing in a line, in order from shortest to tallest. Write 'me' under the picture of yourself.
- Count all the doors in your home.
- Sort the coins in a purse. How many are there of each value.
- Set the table for dinner and then count the cutlery.
- Group all the spoons in the cutlery draw. Count how many teaspoons, dessertspoons, tablespoons. Which spoon is the longest?
- Find things in your home that have a circle/rectangle/triangle/square shape on them.
- Find things at home that are a 'can' shape/'ball' shape/'box' shape
- Draw some things in your home that have numbers written on them.
- Observe what's left and right when you're sitting at the dinner table, in a car, riding a bike. Which direction are you turning?
- Count how many chairs around the dinner table. How many legs?
- Find a pair of shoes from every member of the family. Put them in order from largest to smallest.
- Pretend you are a spider looking down from the ceiling of your bedroom. Draw a picture of what you would see.
- Find a plastic jug and a plastic cup. How many cups of water will it take to fill the jug? What about a bucket?
- Measure heel to toe different areas of your home – length of bedroom, garden, lounge.
- What can you do in one minute? Eg can you walk around the house?
- Find 5 cups the same size. Fill each with a different thing – water, rice, flour, cotton balls, sand etc. Which cup is the heaviest?
- Draw a picture of your family standing in a line from youngest to oldest. Write age of each person. Is the oldest the tallest?
- Choose 5 items in the food cupboard and order their weight.
- Write down the numbers on the houses in your street. Is there a pattern
- Find a colourful picture in a magazine. Cut it out and cut it into pieces. Mix the pieces and put your jigsaw puzzle back together.
- Find twenty things and put them in a row. Count them and draw the thing in the 8<sup>th</sup> place etc.
- How many times can you fold a sheet of paper?

- Count the buttons on your clothes. Which item of clothing has the most buttons?
- Trace around one of your shoes. Cover the shoe with buttons or coins. Compare with mum or dad's shoe.

### \* Physical Activity

Physical activity is important for the healthy development of all children. With childhood obesity supposedly at critical levels it is important that children have opportunities to run and play in fresh air. The Australian Government has recently developed *Physical Activity Recommendations for Children and Young People*. These are that:

1. Children and young people should participate in at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.
2. Children and young people should not spend more than 2 hours a day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. computer games, Internet, TV), particularly during daylight hours.

Some physical activities that your child may be involved in include:

- Organised sports practise
- Swimming lessons or swimming club
- Gymnastics or athletics
- Dance lessons and dance practise
- Scouts
- Camping
- Going to the park
- Family games and outdoor activities
- Trampolining, jumping rope, running or ball games
- Riding a bike at a park or on a bike track
- Completing an obstacle course or bush walking

### \* Cultural

This section of the Homework Grid aims to develop an early interest and appreciation of a broad range of the arts - visual arts, dance, drama and music. This task on the grid recognises the many and varied cultural activities that students are already involved in outside of school hours and encourages an opportunity to further develop a love and appreciation of the arts.

Examples of cultural activities students may participate in include:

- Dance and drama classes
- Band practise
- Music lessons and practises (e.g. piano, flute, drums, violin, guitar, brass, woodwind, recorder etc.)
- Listening to CD's, music DVD's
- Craft work, painting and art
- Visits to drama performances, libraries, theatres, movies and concerts

### \* Investigation

This could be an additional activity related to current units of work being studied in class. It could involve using the internet, watching a current affairs program, collecting items for class displays, searching for information in a newspaper, obtaining information from a grandparent, preparing an assignment or talk etc. In all likelihood the activities will vary each fortnight.

### \* Your Choice

The final sections of the Homework Grid are called **Your Choice!** There are numerous activities that students can engage within and around the home. Many will be activities that the children themselves initiate - playing a family game, writing their own story, taking photos on a family trip, all those wonderful things that students choose to do when they are feeling creative. To help stimulate other ideas we have provided some suggestions below:

#### Care for a pet

Caring for a pet is an important activity that helps children to develop the responsibility of caring for something other than him or herself. There are a number of tasks that a child should be involved in when caring for the family pet:

- Feed your pet
- Fill the water bowl
- Take your pet for a walk
- Give your pet some other exercise
- Give your pet a bath
- Groom your pet
- Clean food bowls
- Clean cages or tanks
- Take your pet to the vet
- Play with your pet

#### Use the Computer

Computer skills are absolutely essential tools for students in their future working life and leisure pursuits. Children will have had to master various computer skills by high school and university as the majority of work is completed this way. It is essential that students develop computer skills like searching the internet for information, having experience using a variety of software applications like Word, PowerPoint and Publisher, and practise hand-eye coordination within educational computer games. Some activities might include:

- Typing and printing a letter to a friend or family member
- Typing a story, poem or shopping list
- Designing and printing a card or invitation for a special occasion
- Playing a math or word game to help practise skills
- Playing an interactive computer game
- Sending an email to a relative
- Visiting a website to find information or play a simple game

- Typing up spelling - (eg. making a Word Search using a simple table)
- Using 'Paint' to draw a picture
- Making a slideshow of family holiday snaps (digital) using 'PowerPoint'
- Taking and saving digital photos

### Talking Time

We talk to lots of different people every day. People who know you like to hear about all the interesting things you do. Don't forget to listen to their great stories too!

### Visiting Friends and Family

- Talk to your parents/carers about your day after dinner or in the car
- Have some playtime or a sleepover at a friend's or relative's house
- Go to a movie or show
- Go to the park or for a walk and share stories
- Talk to your neighbour

### Make a phone call (with your parent's permission)

- Telephone a friend or family member for their birthday or a special occasion that your family celebrates
- Telephone to say thank you to someone who has done something nice for you
- Telephone Mum or Dad or your Grandparents at work/home
- Telephone a friend/relative just to say hello and let them know all about your day
- Telephone a friend/relative to invite them to join you for a special occasion

### Gardening

Many children love being outside and playing in the backyard. Helping with gardening can enhance a child's ability to:

- Care for living things
- Learn about ongoing responsibilities
- Develop an appreciation of nature
- Learn about the needs of living things
- Develop an understanding of life cycles
- Develop creativity and an appreciation for aesthetics

To encourage a child's enthusiasm for gardening, they could plant seeds that mature quickly. Children will feel a sense of responsibility and accomplishment.

### Shopping

Shopping is an incredibly rich and exciting opportunity for discussion, problem solving and learning. Below are a few suggestions for how to harness the learning opportunities presented in a family trip to the shops:

- Talk to your child about shopping and the need for money and change

- Explain the layout of supermarkets - aisles, checkout, meat etc.
- Read the signs hanging around the shops
- Read and compare the prices of various items
- Allow your child to play with and count your money. Describe the different coins - compare the sizes, shapes and colours
- Ask your child to make certain amounts with the money e.g. 20 cents - what different combination of coins can be used?
- Encourage them to mentally work out the change they will receive
- Encourage your child to mentally compute multiple items, e.g. 3 apples at 25 cents each
- Read shopping catalogues at home and decide what you would like to purchase
- Play "I Spy" using prices as a guide, e.g. I spy with my little eye something worth \$2.99
- Allow your child to pick and pack the fruit and veggies, e.g. find me four big oranges

### Cooking

Allowing children to help in the kitchen can be a wonderful learning opportunity for them. Here are a few of the benefits:

- They are experiencing hands-on mathematical concepts and learning to use mathematical language, such as counting out ingredients, measuring and weighing items, dividing or doubling quantities, and estimating amounts.
- They are required to become familiar with following the step-by-step directions in a recipe, improving reading skills.
- They can begin to learn about the scientific concepts of physical and chemical reactions.
- They can improve their fine motor skills through cutting, chopping, measuring, pinching, rolling, opening and closing jars and containers, and stirring mixtures.
- They develop organisational and time management skills.
- They can discuss health and safety practices.
- They can become familiar with responsible hygiene practices, such as the importance of washing hands before preparing food.
- They can begin to learn about healthy eating and nutrition.
- Cooking teaches children some basic life skills and kitchen techniques that they will retain for the rest of their lives.

By including children in meal planning, shopping, preparation, and clean up, they may feel they have some ownership over the meal, and therefore, are more likely to try new tastes! Cooking also provides an ideal opportunity to spend time together, working as part of a team.

### ***Spelling Activities (suitable for home learning)***

1. **Acrostic Poem**                      Make an acrostic poem using the letters of your words eg. SHOE: Stay happy over Easter.
2. **Chalk writing**                      Write your words on the concrete, the chalkboard or a white board. Try writing them with your eyes closed.
3. **Computer**                            Type your words on the computer and print them. Cut and paste them into your spelling journal.
4. **Magazine Cut**                      Find the letters that make up your spelling words in magazines or newspapers and glue them into your spelling journal. You might even be able to find the whole word in the newspaper.
5. **Magnetic Letters**                Arrange the magnetic letters to form spelling words.
6. **Letter Stamps**                      Stamp your spelling words using letter stamps and stamp pad into your spelling journal.
7. **Short Story**                        Write a short story in your spelling journal using all of your spelling words.
8. **Stencil**                                Use a stencil to write spelling words into your spelling journal.
9. **Word Find**                         Using a blank grid make a word find. Include all of your words. Swap with a friend. Glue the word find into your spelling journal.
10. **Musical letters**                 Use different instruments to make the letters of your spelling words. Sing them as you play.
11. **Clap the Rhythm**                Clap the syllables of your spelling words and remember the beat for each word. Also clap and spell the word to different beats.
12. **Singing Spelling**                Sing the letters of your words to a tune that you know and add actions.
13. **Body Shapes**                      Try to make each letter of your spelling word by bending and stretching your body into shapes.
14. **Hopscotch**                        Use chalk to draw hopscotch squares for your spelling words. Hop on the letters in order saying each letter as you land.
15. **Playdough**                        Mould your spelling words from playdough. Roll it into coils and shape the letters of your words.
16. **Sand Tracing**                    Write spelling words in a sand tray.
17. **Sports**                              Skip, jump or hop saying each letter of your spelling words aloud or bounce a ball.
18. **Water Painting**                 Using a container and a paintbrush – paint your words on the concrete. Try to finish each word before the water dries.
20. **Bubble Writing**                 Write your spelling words in your spelling journal using bubble writing.
- 21 **Fancy Letters**                    Draw your spelling words in your spelling journal in large block letters and decorate the letters with a design. Be creative.
22. **Finger Prints**                    Use paint or a stamp pad to finger print the shapes of the letters that make up your spelling words. Print them in your spelling journal.
23. **Hole Punch**                      Use the dots from a hole punch and your spelling journal to create the shapes of your spelling words.
24. **Paper Chain**                      Write the letters of your spelling words on to strips of paper and link them together to make paper chains.
25. **Pin Prick**                         Create your spelling words by pricking holes in paper with a pin. Do this on a soft surface like the carpet.

- 26. Wool Letters** Use wool to form the letters of your spelling words. Glue them into your spelling journal.
- 27. Word Art** Use the letters of your spelling word to create a picture. Do this in your spelling journal.
- 28. Blocks / Objects** Arrange blocks or other objects to form words. Be as inventive as you can. Try placing large objects and viewing from above.
- 29. Matchsticks** Make your spelling words using matchsticks. Choose one word to glue into your spelling journal.
- 30. Word Cube Mobile** Make a cube from a piece of paper. Before gluing it together write your spelling words on the faces.
- 31. Word Shapes** Write your spelling words in lower case and draw around them to form a shape. Think about your shape.
- 32. Friend's Back** Trace your spelling words on to a friend's back. Can they guess your word? Trace slowly.
- 33. Hangman** Use your spelling journal to play hangman. See if your partner can guess your words.
- 34. Morse Code** Use Morse Code to tap words to a friend. Can your friend decode your words?