



**Independent
Schools** Victoria

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Inquiry into Homework in Victorian Schools

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Text of the Independent Schools Victoria presentation to the Victorian Parliament's Education and Training Committee inquiry into approaches to homework in Victoria's schools, focusing on the impact on student learning. The presentation was made by the Director, School Services, Mr Peter Roberts and the General Manager, National Partnerships, Mr Alan Ross.

Introduction

Independent Schools Victoria was established in 1949 and today represents, promotes the interests of, and provides services to 209 Member Schools. Our Member Schools educate more than 132,000 students on over 300 campuses across metropolitan Melbourne and in regional and rural Victoria.

The Independent sector is incredibly diverse. Our membership reflects a variety of religious faiths and ethos with schools affiliated to Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Catholic, Christian, Coptic Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Lutheran, Islamic, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Seventh-day Adventist and Uniting churches. There are inter-, multi- and non-denominational schools, as well as schools for students with learning difficulties and individual needs. Member Schools follow different approaches to education including Montessori and Steiner education philosophies.

Independent schools are located in all regions of Victoria and range in size from over 3000 students on multiple campuses to, in some instances, fewer than 30 students. The communities that these schools serve are spread across the socioeconomic spectrum with many recent arrival families who might not have English as a first language.

As a consequence of this diversity, the range of approaches and philosophies in respect of homework is also diverse. There are Independent schools that have a highly structured approach to homework, where tasks are set and recorded on a daily basis, assessments are made and feedback provided to students and parents. By contrast, there are also schools that have a less formal approach to homework.

**For more information, or to interview Michelle Green
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Approach to Homework

The overriding approach to homework in an Independent school will be determined by the school's philosophy about homework and its role in achieving specific outcomes. Schools take into account the views and expectations of its community when determining the approach, and might ask the following questions:

- Do our parents believe that homework is useful?
- Are our parents prepared to support the school by supporting the homework program?
- Do homework tasks add value to the learning that is occurring during the day at school?
- What are the overall benefits of having homework?

Independent schools are also likely to have different approaches to homework for different sections of the school. For example, at the junior primary school level, the strong focus on literacy might result in an expectation that students are reading at home on a daily basis, particularly to and with their family. By contrast, students in the senior secondary years, particularly in year 12, are expected to work for two to three hours each evening in competing tasks, summarising notes and practising skills.

The challenge, of course, is how to move students from the simple literacy tasks completed in Year 2 to three hours per night of intensive study in Year 12. Generally, schools are moving students to a more structured approach to homework through years 5 to 8, with an emphasis of developing study habits that will prepare students for their senior secondary years.

The other challenge for schools is in ensuring that any homework task:

- is meaningful
- adds to a student's learning
- is followed up by the teacher
- can be successfully completed and doesn't reinforce in students the notion that they cannot learn by themselves.

Homework tasks, particularly from upper primary school when they are more formalised, should be structured in such a way that only the student is completing them and that while parents can and should provide support and guidance, they shouldn't be completing the tasks on behalf of their child.

Schools need to be mindful of what's happening at home when setting homework tasks. There might be many other activities that need to be balanced with homework, such as students having part time jobs or participating in sporting or other activities.

Many families, particularly those associated with some of the faith based schools, have several school aged children at home and being able to create the best environment for those children to complete homework may be challenging. In addition, there are many families in the Independent sector where both parents are working, possibly in the evening and on weekends, and the parents' capacity to support their children's homework may be limited, particularly if the parents' first language is not English.

In summary, the range of views about, and approaches to, homework in the Independent sector are as diverse as the sector itself. All Independent schools are providing an education based on their particular philosophy and the approach to homework should align with that philosophy.