

# Talbot's Homework Policy

## Introductory Statement

After reviewing the literature on homework effectiveness and after extensive consultations throughout 2017–2018 with all students (surveys), with the Student Council (discussion), with parents (survey), with Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and with teachers (survey, discussions), this policy was revised in October 2018.

It was discussed and amended with the staff of the school, the Parents Association, and the In-school Management Committee, and was ratified by the Board of Management on 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2018.

## Rationale for Having a Policy on Homework

It is necessary to have a policy on homework in order to:

- Communicate clearly to parents and staff the expectations of the school regarding homework.
- Help answer questions people have about homework—especially the why and the what.
- Recommend to parents and children ways of managing homework.

## Relationship to Characteristic Spirit of the School

This policy ties in with Talbot's Mission Statement:

“Our school aims to provide a happy, secure, friendly, learning environment, where children, parents, teachers, SNAs, ancillary staff and Board of Management work in partnership. Each individual is valued, encouraged and respected for their uniqueness and facilitated to reach their full potential in a positive atmosphere.

This will enable the child to live a full life and will equip him/her to avail himself/herself of further education so that he/she may go on to live a full and useful life as an adult in society.

The staff is committed to the realisation of these objectives. Our aim is to create a happy, secure environment for our pupils in which there is a sense of good order and a reasonable approach to discipline. In this way, a large group can be organised so that the school can operate smoothly for the benefit of all.”

# Aims of Our Homework Policy

- That class teachers and learning-support teachers aim to make homework effective for all children, and regularly assess how well homework is working, and take corrective action as needed ('effective' here means that the student is learning for him/her the right content at the right time in the right way).
- That each child overall enjoys their homework.
- That homework is given that meets the needs, the strengths, and the interests of the children.
- That parents and children be given a voice in the setting of some homework.
- That teachers have a degree of freedom to set homework content and due dates.
- That homework overall not become stressful for a child, and where it is that parents, children and relevant teacher(s) communicate and work together to identify specific issues and reduce the stress.
- That time limits be set for children to do their homework.

## Details of Our Policy

### Vision

At its best, homework can be wonderfully enriching for children, especially when they have a significant degree of choice and control (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). At these times, children thrive on it, loving the opportunities it provides, such as to work with someone at home, to show off at home, and—often, when encouraged—go further than the homework assigned. In short, homework can help children know and get a buzz off the joy of learning.

At its worst, homework can be a drag—for children, for parents/guardians, and for teachers. It can lead to significant stress for all concerned. It can be a waste of time and effort by everyone.

At Talbot, to help children love learning, we believe in giving homework that:

- Is consistently carefully set, bearing in mind children's needs, strengths, and interests.
- Is led by the teacher, with input from children and from parents/guardians.
- Is supported by parents/guardians.
- Does not take up too much of a child's/family's non-school free time. We set limits on time to be spent on homework so that families are free to decide how to spend their evenings.
- Reduces and even eliminates stress for children and parents/guardians.
- Builds a child's intrinsic motivation, so that we help them become great learners.

Ultimately, as Carr (2013) summarised in her review of the literature on homework: "Effective homework should be purposeful, efficient, personalized, doable, and inviting."

### When is Homework Given?

Homework is typically given daily except Fridays.

If a child earns a "Homework Pass" through the Discipline for Learning System they will have a night off written homework—the last Thursday of each month is Homework Pass day. Also, the class may have a

night off homework as an acknowledgement of some special occasion such as winning “Class of the Month” or “Super Recyclers”.

## **Homework Content**

Homework at Talbot typically consists of a mixture of tasks: maths, reading, writing, and other learning. Examples of homework include reading a PM book, reading aloud, spellings, written work, tables, Mental Maths, Mathletics, pieces to be ‘learned-off-by-heart’, drawing/colouring, physical exercises, practising a song, asking family history questions at home, searching the Internet for information, collecting items, project work, and finishing work started in class.

All of the homework is intended to help the child learn. It is all important. Some children sometimes feel that reading and ‘learning by heart’ is not real homework—it is just as important as other homework. Parents/Guardians help a child enormously by listening to their child read and listening to items to be learned-off-by-heart.

Teachers choose what homework to set. At times this may involve giving children deadlines of a few days to complete some work. It may involve, where applicable, giving parents a role in setting some work for their child. It may also involve giving children a degree of choice of suitable work, for example they may create a ‘Choice Board.’ It may also involve project work. Teachers meet each term in their class groupings to discuss homework.

For a lot of the year, we include ‘Mathletics’ as part of the homework, asking that children do 10 minutes of it each night. This programme helps in the teaching and reinforcement of the maths concepts that the children learn in class. Where a child does not have access to internet connection at home, teachers can let the child do their Mathletics homework on the computers in the classroom or during lunchtime in the computer room.

## **Differentiated Homework**

Each child is different. When setting homework teachers aim to give homework that meets the needs, the strengths, and the interests of the children; In effect this means that not all children will receive the same homework.

## **Duration of Homework**

We do not want children to spend too long at their homework. Below are limits for time to be spent at homework. While we do want all children to do all their homework, and teachers try their best to give homework that they believe the children can do within the time limits, we realise that sometimes for some children certain things are just too hard—in those situations we want parents to feel free to stop their child, praise them for their effort, and write a brief note to teacher explaining what happened.

It is important to remember that it is the quality and not the quantity of homework that matters.

The following are the limits for each class grouping:

3rd Class: 30–40 minutes

4th Class: 30–40 minutes

5th Class: 40–50 minutes

6th Class: 40–50 minutes

## **Children’s Responsibilities**

To make the most of homework’s learning opportunities, children must:

- Write down homework accurately in their homework journal.
- Ask the teacher any questions they have about the homework.
- Ensure they take home relevant books and copies.
- Complete homework assignments to the best of their ability. Effort is the most important thing.
- Complete their written work neatly.
- Tell their parents/guardians and teachers of difficulties.
- Get a parent or guardian to sign that their homework is done each day, and where it’s not done or completed, to write a note explaining why.
- Show teachers any notes from home.
- Listen carefully to teachers giving feedback to them about their homework, seeing what they did well and aiming to learn from their mistakes with an attitude of “Mistakes are great! They’re great opportunities to learn more.”

## **Parents’/Guardians’ Responsibilities**

To give their children the best chance of making the most of homework’s learning opportunities, parents/guardians must:

- Encourage a positive attitude towards homework in all subjects from an early age.
- Supervise your child’s homework: Helping your child and answering their questions is a good thing, but resist doing the work for them. Keep urging your child to work a little more independently. The sooner they learn independent-learning skills, the better.
- Agree a suitable time for doing homework, taking into account age, parents’/guardians’ availability, and other family activities.
- Provide a quiet place with a suitable work surface, free from distractions, interruptions, phones, and T.V.
- Encourage good presentation of work.
- Praise effort: praising effort (rather than praising ability) has been proven to build a child’s resilience so that they keep trying when things are hard.
- Communicate to the teacher whenever needed. It is important, for example, to make a note to explain if the homework wasn’t all done. It is also important and helpful to tell the teacher if the child is finding something difficult.
- Sign your child’s journal each day after checking homework is completed.
- Check that your child has everything ready that is needed for the next school day: all necessary books and copies, the homework journal, pencils/pens, and complete uniform/P.E. clothes as needed for the next school day.

## **Teachers’ Responsibilities**

To make the most of homework’s learning opportunities, teachers must:

- Teach the children how to do homework.
- Work in-class on children’s study habits, self-regulation, ability to focus and ability to avoid distractions.

- Set homework, bearing in mind the differences amongst the children in strengths, needs, and interests. Ensure that all homework that is set first passes the test “Is it needed?”
- Explain the homework clearly and check children understand what’s required.
- Review work and provide feedback to students. Monitor homework to help identify pupils’ strengths and needs, especially children with special difficulties.
- Communicate with parents. Teachers sometimes use texts, emails, and phone calls, and often use the school journal as a good means of communication between the school and the home.

## **Homework Clubs**

Talbot runs a Homework Club, supervised by our teaching staff with SNA help too. They run in Terms 1 and 2.

The aim of the clubs is to give the children good homework techniques and provide help when needed.

Each child in 3rd class is offered a place. Teachers in 4th, 5th and 6th class can nominate children they feel are struggling with homework or would benefit from doing their homework in a supervised situation. These nominated children are then offered a place in the clubs.

## **Homework Monitoring**

Ideally, teachers check homework and homework journals on a daily basis. However, it is not always possible or practical to do this every day.

Most homework is given for completion by the following day, but sometimes some class teachers give work that can be completed over a few nights.

As children get older and learn to work independently, some items of homework are checked less often, for example every second day. Some items of homework may be checked by children themselves, under the direction of the teacher; this can be a useful part of the learning process for children as it promotes personal responsibility.

## **What Happens When Homework is Not Done?**

When homework is not completed, the child must do the homework that evening along with the current day’s homework.

If homework is not completed regularly, the teacher contacts parents with a view to solving the situation. It’s important to understand what is the issue. This is where good communication between teachers and parents/guardians is very helpful. Most often teachers can help parents/guardians and the children in resolving the issue.

The teacher may decide to invoke the DFL (Discipline For Learning) policy, and send home Yellow or Red cards to alert the parent/guardian to the problem.

If the situation persists, the matter may be brought to the attention of the Principal who will contact the parents/guardians and arrange a meeting to discuss how the matter can be resolved.

## **If Homework is a Problem**

- Try! Always try! Get rid of any distractions. Concentrate.
- Ask for help at home.
- If you don’t get all your homework done in time, tell your parents/guardians you need a note from

them for your teacher—the school journal is a good place for this.

- Tell the teacher the following day that you had a problem. If there is a note, show the teacher the note.
- Listen carefully to the teacher as he/she gives feedback to you.

## Success Criteria For This Policy

- Annual growth in the numbers of children expressing that they enjoy homework. This is in response to the question: “How much do you normally enjoy homework? (*Give an answer from 1 to 10. 1 is ‘not at all.’ 10 is ‘Totally.’*)”
- Annual reduction in the numbers of children expressing stress with homework. This is in response to the question: “How much does homework make you feel stressed (worried or upset)? (*1 is ‘not at all.’ 10 is ‘Totally.’*)”
- Annual increase in the numbers of children expressing happiness with the content of their homework. This is in response to the question: “How much do you like the type of homework you receive? (*1 is ‘not at all.’ 10 is ‘Totally.’*)”
- Homework being done by everyone.
- Teachers overall happy with the homework policy.
- Parents overall happy with the homework policy.
- Less Yellow/Red cards being given for homework issues.

## Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibilities of the children, the parents/guardians, and the teachers are laid out above. In addition, the Principal is responsible to ensure the Homework Policy is being implemented.

## Timetable for Review

May 2019: a Homework Committee (Ms Madden, Mr Coleman, Ms Lynch, Mr Molloy, Ms Shaw, Mr Stuart, Ms Ward) will meet to review how the policy is working, after consultation with parents (Parents Committee), teachers, SNAs, and children (Student Council and each class). If no changes are needed to the policy it will stay the same.

May 2021: a full and detailed review of how homework is operating at Talbot and how it can be further improved.

## Ratification and Communication

This policy was ratified on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2018 by the Chairperson of the Board of Management, Mick Lordan. A synopsis of the Homework Policy will be included in the next school journal. The Homework Policy will be discussed with new parents at the 3<sup>rd</sup> class welcome meeting each September. A copy of the policy will be available from the school office and on the school website

<http://scoitalbot.scoilnet.ie/blog/>.

## Appendix

### Recommended Procedure for Managing Homework Not Done

- (1) Ask the child about it.
- (2) See if there's a note.
- (3) Communicate with the parents/guardians. Based on past experience with this child's homework, make an informed decision as to how to communicate:
  - a. by giving a Yellow Card, or
  - b. another way:
    - i. for example: a note in the child's journal,
    - ii. for example: using one of a supply of pre-printed notes along the lines of:

" \_\_\_\_\_ was unable to show his/her homework today in school.

Per our school homework policy, if \_\_\_\_\_ continues to not present homework, s/he'll have to get Yellow Cards each time along with lines to do. Nobody wants that to happen!

Please write a short note telling me what the problem was. I want to know so that I can work with you to make sure \_\_\_\_\_ does their homework, enjoys their homework, and has success with it. I will reply to your note, so please ask \_\_\_\_\_ for my reply.

In general, if you are having homework problems with \_\_\_\_\_ please let us know: it's really all about communication. Thanks!"

- (4) Think about differentiating homework for this child.
- (5) If the child continues to present without homework done, and without reasonable explanations, give out Yellow Cards along with lines to do.