



EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools

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This Inquiry was conducted during the term of the 57th Parliament.

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Functions of the Committee

The functions of the Education and Training Committee are set out in section 9 of the *Parliamentary Committees Act 2003* (Vic). That section states:

The functions of the Education and Training Committee are, if so required or permitted under this Act, to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on any proposal, matter or thing concerned with education or training.

Terms of reference

INQUIRY INTO THE APPROACHES TO HOMEWORK IN VICTORIAN SCHOOLS

The Legislative Assembly of the Victorian Parliament has asked the Education and Training Committee to conduct an Inquiry on the approaches to homework in Victorian schools, focusing on the impact on student learning, including:

(a) evidence supporting the value of homework:

- (i) benefits to individual students' learning;
- (ii) contribution to discipline and other life skills; and
- (iii) engagement of parents in student learning;

(b) current approaches to homework, including application of, and access to, technology outside of the classroom/school:

- (i) as a tool to reinforce learning;
- (ii) differences across primary and secondary school and the sectors;
- (iii) approaches in Indigenous and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse background communities;
- (iv) individual versus team homework;
- (v) conceptual versus applied;
- (vi) relevance to curriculum;
- (vii) integration into how teachers help students learn;
- (viii) assessment;
- (ix) reporting and feedback methods; and

(x) best practice models;

(c) future of homework in Victorian schools:

(i) balance between reinforcing and extending what has been learnt in the classroom with time to undertake extracurricular activities and to spend time with family;

(ii) differentiated approaches for primary and secondary schools;

(iii) the nature, and time dedicated to, homework to facilitate best student learning in different communities; and

(iv) application of, and access to, technology to assist learning.

The Committee is required to report by 4 September 2014.

Chair's Foreword

This report on the approaches and impact of homework on student learning in Victorian schools is the considered synthesis of the Committee from the invaluable input that was offered via the many submissions made and the evidence taken during the Inquiry's hearings in Melbourne.

This rich harvest of information which was skilfully augmented through erudite research on behalf of the Committee's staff provides the basis for the Recommendations and the Committee's Findings.

The Committee has reported on the twelve (12) Findings and the eleven (11) Recommendations it has made.

What resonates most strongly from our Inquiry on the approaches to homework in Victorian schools and its impact on student learning is just how much debate prevails. The most authoritative, learned academics, teaching professionals, teaching educators and importantly individual school communities, parent and students have differing opinions on the value of homework.

The enduring argument for homework has centred on the belief that homework in addition to the completion of set tasks serves to generally improve academic skills, the acquisition of greater knowledge and also essential life skills, such as time management, setting priorities, planning and problem solving.

Those who feel that homework now has a diminished benefit, also feel that unnecessary pressure is inflicted on students. Furthermore, homework's detractors argue that time spent on homework is better spent on physical and recreational activities, artistic endeavours, family and community engagement, and that this is a better direction for holistically developing a 'complete' person.

Underpinning this side of the debate is what renowned author Pasi Sahlberg has to say about the Finnish education system's approach to homework. In *Finnish Lessons*, Pasi Sahlberg reveals that, 'A relaxed culture of learning and a lack of stress and anxiety certainly play a role in the achievement of good overall results in Finnish schools. Finnish educators don't believe that doing more homework necessarily leads to better learning, especially if pupils are working on routine and intellectually unchallenging drills'.

We also gained insight into how homework was viewed by students themselves. We are particularly appreciative of the evidence from the secondary students, who attended the hearings and who shared their concerns with the Committee. For many students, receiving feedback from teachers on set homework was critical for them, these students often had to ask teachers for an insight into where they were making errors.

Recommendation Seven encompasses encouragement for an investigation to be launched into finding new ways of supporting a homework feedback program for teachers. The increasing interest and recognition of the value of the Flipped Learning model is also reflected in this Recommendation.

Parents want to do the right thing by their children's education and many feel that their involvement in homework provides a special means of monitoring their child's progress at school and gives them the means to communicate with their child in a dedicated manner. Sometimes this sees expression in the parents doing the homework. This natural drive to do the best for their children can result taking their involvement further, by the supplementing of their child's learning with tutoring.

We gained insight into the commitment parents and their children make to tutoring and feel that with a growing trend of supplementing learning through the engagement of tutors, Recommendation Eight is timely.

With regards to one of the tenets of Recommendation Five, the notion of a support network for new teachers to assist in best homework practice, it will serve the reader well to be cognisant of the current debate on teacher education.

Already Victorian schools have the imprimatur to set their own policies with regards to homework. Looking to best practice models overseas we see that the Finnish education system strives to provide as much autonomy as possible for its schools.

The setting of homework often places demands on students that cannot be fulfilled for reasons and circumstances outside of the school precinct.

Students coming from disadvantaged or diverse backgrounds often lack a quiet space, have language problems, cannot access the technological resources expected of them or need to spend homework time caring for younger siblings or helping in the family business.

Fortunately, in some areas there are homework clubs. These have arisen to help support the learning of students from migrant backgrounds, who may be experiencing disadvantage. In Recommendation Eleven we have shone light on their work and stressed the need to ensure their viability.

The following concepts and issues warrant special emphasis, namely: feedback on homework is crucial step in the learning process and without timely feedback some of the learning benefits of homework may be reduced; new teachers in Victorian schools may currently lack support to identify and set quality homework; there is an increasing reliance on the role of tutors, often engaged to provide students with a competitive edge; homework can reduce the time students spend on activities and interests; new concepts and models such as Flipped Learning are increasingly being adopted. When setting

homework, children with learning disabilities will benefit from an improved understanding of their specific needs from teaching professionals.

As a Committee we are indeed indebted to the people of Victoria for their input to this Inquiry.

So on behalf of the Members of the Education and Training Committee, I wish to express our gratitude to the many individuals and organisations, including our learned and very wise education academics, teaching professionals, school principals, school leaders, parents, community leaders and students themselves who provided us with invaluable insight into this very complex subject matter.

I am appreciative of the fact that our hearings were enriched by the input we received from the extraordinary cohort of students, student organisations and on the ground professional and volunteer groups, such as the Centre for Multicultural Youth, that are offering such worthy support for children from CALD backgrounds, through their work with community based homework clubs. We derived much insight into the problems faced by students with learning disabilities and I especially thank those who represented students with specific learning disabilities.

My gratitude is also extended to the Committee Members, Mr Colin Brooks MP (Deputy Chair), Mr Peter Crisp MP, Mr Nazih Elasmr MLC and Mrs Amanda Millar MLC for their commitment and solid work during the Inquiry, the hearings and the subsequent deliberations, all of which have meaningfully and directly contributed to this Report, its Findings and Recommendations.

In further extending my gratitude, I wish to nominate the fine members of the Committee's Secretariat, Mr Michael Baker in his capacity as Executive Officer, Ms Stephanie Dodds as Administrative Officer and Mr Anthony Walsh as Research Officer for their splendid endeavours and application of their skills and knowledge.

From the beginning this team of highly competent professionals have approached the Inquiry with commitment and a strong interest in the task. Such an inquiry often has its points where hard work is required and long hours need to be worked to ensure the smooth operation. Right throughout each member has shown dedication and professionalism and frankly have been a joy to work with.

I commend the Committee's final report to the Victorian Parliament.



Jan Kronberg MLC

Chair

Executive Summary

Most education systems allow for some homework, although the amount of homework assigned and the emphasis placed upon it varies widely, not only across national boundaries but across state and provincial jurisdictions, across school regions and even within schools. For proponents of homework, it assists not only in developing academic skills and expanding knowledge, but also in developing non-academic or broader life skills such as self-discipline, time management and problem solving. For those opposed to homework, many feel that it creates unnecessary pressure on students for limited or disputed academic benefit, robs children of time to develop other life skills, through recreational and artistic activities and social interaction, and places pressure on family life.

The differences in perspective that emerge throughout the literature on the relative effectiveness of homework as a learning tool are reflected in the submissions received by the Committee. This is an issue that does not enjoy unanimity of opinion. The lack of consensus is further exacerbated by the limited and somewhat ambiguous empirical data available. Coming to any strong conclusion about the effectiveness of homework as a learning tool is difficult because, while there have been a large number of studies done, they are often not directly comparable and have different and often contradictory findings. The lack of solid empirical data upon which to base homework policies has been acknowledged in both submissions, and in evidence given in public hearings.

The Homework Debate

It is not possible from the available data to make unequivocal statements about the effectiveness of homework overall in assisting student learning. There are too many factors that need to be considered in making such judgments, including: the age and stage of the students; the subject matter; the purposes of the individual homework assignments; the ability of the individual student; the quality of the homework assignments; the socio-economic or cultural context of the student or school community and the support provided by the parents.

Some of the key benefits of homework claimed by proponents include:

- improving understanding of classwork;
- getting good grades;
- opportunities to practice skills;
- preparation for the next lesson;
- help in developing good discipline;
- independent learning skills; and
- help in developing time management and study skills.

Conversely, in the first instance the case against homework is based not on evidence of its negative effects, but on the perceived absence of evidence that it actually aids learning. By this argument, if there are no clear benefits, then the potential damage it can do in adding to pressure on young people already under developmental stress, taking young people away from family and other relationships, impinging on time for extracurricular activities that have health and social benefits and in widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, makes homework not worth doing. It is also argued that the role of 'homework policing' by parents creates tensions in the family that arise because of the resentment of children, particularly in adolescence, of further loss of autonomy.

Despite the potential for homework to create tension within families, the evidence presented to the Committee suggested strongly that parents have a vital role to play in their child's learning and that successful schools see education as a collaborative process between the student, parent and the school, and consider parents to be 'partners' in their children's education. The Committee was advised that schools that assist parents in providing support to their children tend to have better educational outcomes.

It has generally been accepted that homework is most effective as a learning tool in the secondary years and that in primary school it is often seen as a way of developing study habits and self-discipline, and has little or no academic impact.

Homework policy development

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development does not have a direct role in the development or enforcement of homework policies, but rather it supports schools to have this conversation with its community and develop policies that are appropriate for the individual school. The Department has developed and published guidelines to assist schools to develop their homework policies, but the Department acknowledged during the Inquiry that the guidelines have not been up-dated for 7 years. The Committee considers that it is important that schools have not only up-to-date guidelines, but that they are developing their policies based on comprehensive and current research. It has therefore recommended that the Department not only urgently reviews its homework guidelines, but that it provides schools with a framework for developing their policies, which are based on a comprehensive review of current research.

To aid the development of the framework, the Committee has also recommended that the Department undertakes or commissions a project assessing the effectiveness of homework practice in Victorian schools based on gathered empirical evidence. It has also recommended that schools should be assisted in keeping their homework policies current and relevant by the Department undertaking or commissioning an evaluation of a

selected number of homework policies in order to develop an evaluation template for schools to review their own policies on an on-going basis.

The Committee received evidence that good homework practice revolved around quality, quantity, assessment and feedback, with the quality of the homework generally being the most important issue. The Department suggested that quality homework should be meaningful, relevant and appropriate to the age and skill level of the student, and should be assessed by the teacher.

The Committee found that measuring homework by the time spent doing it is an imprecise and inadequate measure that does not take into account the quality of the work or the ability of the student or their access to technology or other resources.

An important part of the learning process associated with homework is assessment and feedback. Research suggests that students learn more when homework is returned promptly with comments. Feedback provides students with encouragement and reinforces the skills acquired and the Committee was advised during the Inquiry that providing students with feedback was critical in mastering new skills, as it allows students to track what they know and what they do not understand. The Committee has recommended that all homework policies require assessment and feedback mechanisms to be stipulated.

Teacher training was not part of the Inquiry's terms of reference and is a large and complex area that would be a substantial inquiry in itself. As a result, the Committee has not focussed on this area, except to note that new teachers in Victorian schools may currently lack pre-service experience to identify and set quality homework and has recommended that collaborative lesson and homework planning in Victorian schools be facilitated and that the Department investigate offering professional development to teachers to explain current research in homework and assist them to set quality homework.

Flipped Learning

One of the interesting innovations in education that has the potential for affecting homework is 'Flipped Learning'. Flipped Learning is where students undertake preparatory reading or watch video lectures at home. This means that the work that is traditionally done in class is now completed at home, and the work that is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class through discussions and the development of ideas. The appeal and adoption of this model has increased as technology has advanced.

Flipped Learning allows students to take responsibility for the pace of their own learning, as they can do this at a time of their choice and in a format with which they are comfortable, such as watching YouTube videos and the like. This method also enables

students to review concepts at their own pace, rather than at the teacher's pace, ensuring comprehension. Class time is used to apply and test this knowledge in a supervised setting. In supporting further development of this innovative approach, the Committee has recommended that the Department investigate ways to support a new homework feedback paradigm including the development of flipped learning models and the sharing of online resources between schools.

Private Tutors

An issue that has been raised during the Inquiry that was not part of the Terms of Reference, but has implications for homework was the proliferation of private tutors, and the strong uptake of their services. The Committee has not undertaken a comprehensive inquiry into this issue, but considers that such an inquiry in the future may be beneficial. The evidence the Committee did hear suggested that the drive to use the services of private tutors may place undue financial pressure on families. It has been pointed out that this prevalence has the potential to undermine the value of the assistance they can provide, by shifting the focus from the work assigned by the teacher to work assigned by the tutor. There were also concerns raised that tutors operate in an unregulated environment and that some tutors made themselves 'indispensable' to their students, thus undermining the development of the students' own capacity.

The Committee does not consider that the engagement of tutors is, in itself, of no value and that parents should not commit to it. There will be some students and some circumstances, when a tutor would make a significant difference to a student's understanding or skill level and this can, in turn, improve learning outcomes. The Committee does, however, consider that tutors should be seen as an adjunct to, rather than an alternative to, the education system. On the issue of the potential risks of an unregulated environment for tutors, the Committee recommends that the Government considers whether regulatory and accreditation arrangements for private tutors may be justified and, in consultation with the tutoring industry, schools and parent bodies determines what form such arrangements may take.

Disadvantage arising from homework

Homework has the potential to cause inequities between students. This inequality arises as students have different support structures and different access to resources, which can affect not only the quality of the homework, but also the ability to complete it. For example, students from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally have greater access to resources and materials, such as computers and tutors. These students may also be less likely to be forced to choose between family responsibilities or work and their assigned homework.

The Committee identified a number forms of disadvantage that have the potential to impact on both students' capacity to complete homework, and the effectiveness of it as a learning tool. These disadvantages relate to language and cultural differences, socio-economic differences and learning disabilities.

In relation to learning disabilities, while not specifically part of the terms of reference, the Committee was advised during the inquiry that students with learning disabilities experience more difficulties with homework than their peers without disabilities. This may be because the homework is inappropriate and consequently these students need more time than their peers to complete the same tasks. The Committee therefore recommends that the Department offer professional development to teachers covering the main types of learning disabilities and offering strategies on how to adapt homework plans to accommodate their different needs.

In relation to cultural and language challenges and those created by socio-economic disadvantage, the Committee examined the role played by homework clubs in addressing some of the inequities that can arise.

Not all students have access to an appropriate homework environment at home, with the necessary quiet space with appropriate lighting and access to books and computers. In addition to providing access to volunteers to assist with homework, homework clubs can provide such an environment to facilitate students completing their homework. Homework clubs fill a vital role by providing students with access to information and technology they may not have at home, particularly clubs that operate out of a local or school library.

Financial uncertainty combined with the reliance on volunteers may mean it is difficult for homework clubs across the state to provide a consistent level of academic support. Volunteers may not be experts where students need support, and this support may not be able to be purchased. The challenge is to build on the success of these programs, while striving to offer all students the same educational opportunities.

The Committee has recommended that the Department identifies the number of homework clubs in operation across the state and examines ways to ensure students of all abilities from across the State are able to access the support they require in such settings, and that it undertakes a review of homework clubs to ensure their long-term viability.

List of key findings

CHAPTER 4: HOMEWORK PRACTICES IN VICTORIA

FINDING 1 44

Feedback on homework is a crucial step in the learning process and without timely feedback some of the learning benefits of homework may be reduced.

FINDING 2 46

New teachers in Victorian schools may currently lack support to identify and set quality homework.

FINDING 3 48

Homework can reduce the amount of time available to pursue other activities and interests which may have equal or greater long term benefit.

FINDING 4 53

Flipped learning offers a new way of engaging children in education and may allow for a better use of time in the classroom.

CHAPTER 5: FACTORS AFFECTING HOMEWORK PERFORMANCE

FINDING 5 57

There is strong evidence and general agreement that homework at the primary school level has little impact on academic performance, but may play an important transitional role in preparing students for secondary school and beyond.

FINDING 6 60

Measuring homework by the time spent doing it is an imprecise and inadequate measure that does not take into account the quality of the work or the ability of the student or, increasingly importantly, student access to technology.

FINDING 7 63

Homework can have the effect of helping a parent to understand the progress the child is making or otherwise and can therefore help make parent-teacher interviews more meaningful.

FINDING 8 65

Successful schools see education as a collaborative process between the student, parent and the school, and consider parents to be ‘partners’ in their children’s education. Schools that assist parents in providing support to their children tend to have better educational outcomes.

FINDING 9 67

Homework’s value is largely as a tool to develop the capacity of students, even when it has no mark or grade attached.

FINDING 10..... 74

The proliferation of private tutors may place undue financial pressure on families and has the potential to undermine the value of the assistance they can provide, by shifting the focus from the work assigned by the teacher to work assigned by the tutor.

CHAPTER 6: DISADVANTAGE ARISING FROM HOMEWORK

FINDING 11..... 81

Homework may need to be adapted for children with learning disabilities to ensure they obtain the same benefit from homework as their peers.

FINDING 12..... 88

Homework clubs provide a vital service for students who experience a form of disadvantage. They engage students who may otherwise drop out of the system.

List of recommendations

CHAPTER 3: INTERNATIONAL HOMEWORK COMPARISONS

RECOMMENDATION ONE 26

That the Department urgently reviews its homework guidelines and provides schools with a framework for developing their policies which are based on a comprehensive review of current research.

RECOMMENDATION TWO 34

That the Department undertakes or commissions a project assessing the effectiveness of homework practice in Victorian schools based on gathered empirical evidence as highlighted in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4: HOMEWORK PRACTICES IN VICTORIA

RECOMMENDATION THREE 37

The Department should undertake or commission an evaluation of a selected number of homework policies in order to develop an evaluation template for schools to review their own policies on an on-going basis.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR 44

That all homework policies require assessment and feedback mechanisms to be stipulated.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE 46

That the Department facilitate collaborative lesson and homework planning in Victorian schools, similar to that employed in the United Kingdom, to provide a support network for new teachers.

RECOMMENDATION SIX 47

That the Department investigate offering professional development to teachers to explain current research in homework and assist them to identify and set quality homework.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN 53

That the Department investigate ways to support a new homework feedback paradigm including the development of flipped learning models and the sharing of online resources between schools.

CHAPTER 5: FACTORS AFFECTING HOMEWORK PERFORMANCE

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT 74

The Committee recommends that the Government considers whether regulatory and accreditation arrangements for private tutors may be justified and, in consultation with the tutoring industry, schools and parent bodies determines what form such arrangements may take.

CHAPTER 6: DISADVANTAGE ARISING FROM HOMEWORK

RECOMMENDATION NINE 82

That the Department offer professional development to teachers covering the main types of learning disabilities and offering strategies on how to adapt homework plans to accommodate their different needs.

RECOMMENDATION TEN 85

That the Department identifies the number of homework clubs in operation across the state and examines ways to ensure students of all abilities from across the State are able to access the support they require in such settings.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN..... 89

That the Department undertake a review of homework clubs to ensure their long-term viability.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Most education systems allow for some homework, although the amounts of homework assigned and the emphasis placed upon it varies widely, not only across national boundaries but across state and provincial jurisdictions, across school regions and even within schools. For proponents of homework, it assists not only in developing academic skills and expanding knowledge, but also in developing non-academic or broader life skills such as self-discipline, time management and problem solving. For those opposed to homework, it creates unnecessary pressure on students for limited or disputed academic benefit, robs children of time to develop other life skills through recreational and artistic activities and social interaction and places pressure on family life.

The debate about the effectiveness of homework as a tool of learning has continued for more than a century. There have been more than 130 studies published related to the subject and these have reached different and, at times, quite contradictory conclusions. The results of studies have been affected by the age and stage of students studied, sample sizes, subject differences, and interpretations of results have been affected by assumptions made. As a result of the variations of study findings, it is not possible to say with any confidence whether homework overall has positive academic impacts. There is some evidence to suggest that in the later school years there may be some benefits to homework, at least in test results; there is, however, little evidence to suggest it has any discernible effect on academic results in primary school. The quantifiable evidence in Australia is extremely limited in either case and any assertions about the effectiveness of homework or otherwise as a learning tool should be treated with caution. The non-academic benefits are even less easy to measure and will be even more open to interpretation.

Due to the lack of reliable quantifiable evidence about the link between homework and academic achievement, the Committee in this report does not attempt to make definitive findings either way about the academic effects of homework. Instead, it explores some of the key issues raised and hopes to inform school communities who are responsible for developing their own homework policies so that the approaches to homework make a positive impact on students' education.

1.1 Scope of the Inquiry

1.1.1 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference for the inquiry were referred to the Committee by the Parliament on 29 November 2013. The terms of reference were extremely broad ranging, enquiring about over-arching issues of the overall value of homework as both an academic tool and one that

may assist in the holistic development of children, to more specific questions related to different approaches taken within age groups or cultural and socio-economic communities.

In overview, the terms of reference are in 3 parts, being:

- a) evidence supporting the value of homework;
- b) current approaches to homework, including application of, and access to, technology outside of the classroom/school; and
- c) the future of homework in Victorian schools.

1.1.2 What did the Committee Examine?

As in many inquiries, the issues addressed in this inquiry are not strictly separate and mutually exclusive, but are often multi-dimensional and intertwined. For example, the issue of engagement of parents in learning is not simply about what effect such engagement has on the parents' involvement in their children's education, but has an impact on the effectiveness of learning and can have implications for equity in education. It is therefore necessary to address parental engagement in different ways. Similarly, the question of conceptual approaches is addressed in Chapter 3 in discussions about the arguments for and against homework. Much of the subsequent material deals with what is actually done and why, which addresses the issue of applied approaches. It is therefore not necessary to address this term of reference in a separate section as it is implicit throughout the report.

Because of the complexity of some of the issues, it is not appropriate to use the terms of reference as a virtual 'table of contents' and to address each one in turn. However, the inquiry and the report has addressed most of the terms of reference, with the emphasis being placed on issues that appeared to the Committee to have the most significant impact on Homework as a learning tool. The question of 'Best Practice Models' would be an inquiry in itself and would require a detailed review, not only of literature, but an examination of a number of different approaches, both across subject matter and jurisdictions. The timeframe allowed for this inquiry does not enable such a review to be undertaken in sufficient detail. However, in the Committee's view, such a study would be of significant value and could be the focus of another inquiry.

There is also some discussion about an issue that was not raised in the terms of reference but that, in the Committee's view, had the potential to have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of homework. This issue revolves around the increasing use of private tutors. In Chapter Two, the Committee has defined homework as "tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours"¹

¹ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85.

Because tutors provide an additional layer of teaching, and are increasingly operating outside of the work assigned by teachers, the Committee has not considered them to be necessarily part of the Homework process. However, concerns have been raised about the proliferation of private tutors during the course of the inquiry and the Committee considers that these concerns need to be addressed. Therefore, there is some discussion about this issue in Chapter Five.

1.2 An Overview of Responsibility for Homework Policies

Responsibility for developing homework policies has been devolved to schools. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (the Department) has not itself developed policies related to homework, but has instead developed guidelines which are intended as a ‘framework to help schools engage their communities when reviewing their existing homework policies’.²

In a public hearing, the Department advised the Committee that the guidelines had not been formally reviewed for more than seven years, and the current inquiry was therefore timely as it would be used to assist in gathering input from schools and other stakeholders as part of a review of the guidelines and expectations.³

The Department’s Guidelines and Expectations are discussed further in Chapter Two. The fact that individual schools and school communities have responsibility for the development of their own policies regarding homework, within a fairly broad framework, means that there are likely to be a wide range of approaches to the subject. During the conduct of the Inquiry, the Committee has been unable to accurately ascertain how many schools actually have a formal homework policy.

The Department advised the Committee in a public hearing that it is not the Department’s role to monitor the policies of individual schools, but that:

...schools are quite autonomous, and they report to their school councils. Through their annual implementation plan they would be reporting on the policies within their schools and the effectiveness of those and adjusting them to meet the needs and expectations of their local communities.⁴

This approach is similar to the practice in other States. The Director General of the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment advised the Committee that in recognition that there can be different views about homework policy the issue has been devolved to schools in Queensland:

² Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria)*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>> viewed 1 July 2014.

³ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 2.

⁴ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 7.

*In recognition of the research findings and the controversial nature of homework, Queensland state schools develop and review their homework policy in consultation with the school community*⁵

The Director General further advised that it is a requirement that where a school has a policy to set homework, there is monitoring to ensure consistency and effectiveness and that issues such as potential disadvantage as a result of the access to resources such as computers and internet are considered. The potential for homework policies to have equity implications is discussed in detail in Chapter Four of this report.

Similarly, the Tasmanian Government advised the Committee that it is the responsibility of schools to 'develop, implement and monitor their school's approach to homework'.⁶

In Western Australia, each public (government) school is expected to have a 'documented approach to homework that takes into account the needs of the students, their phase of development and the context of the school.'⁷ According to his submission, the WA Minister for Education's view is that 'public schools are best placed to make decisions regarding their teaching and learning programs'.⁸

The devolution of homework policy to the individual schools is consistent across jurisdictions and also reflects the key theme in the literature that there is no 'one size that fits all' element to approaches to homework. As will be discussed in Chapter Two, there are a significant number of factors that may affect the effectiveness of homework as a learning tool and that, while there are some consistent elements of good homework practice, no blanket, system-wide policy is likely to be effective and may, in fact, be an obstacle to effective education.

1.3 The Inquiry Process

The Committee commenced the inquiry on 27 November 2013, the day it was referred by the Parliament. Following a media statement, the Committee prepared advertisements for major newspapers, *The Age*, the *Herald Sun* and the *Weekly Times* and these advertisements were published in the first week of the inquiry. The advertisements called for submissions addressing the terms of reference, with a deadline for submissions of 14 February 2014.

In addition to advertising in the media, the Committee wrote to more than 120 organisations with an interest in education inviting them to submit to the inquiry and, in some cases, requesting responses to specific questions. The Committee also arranged through the Department to have its calls for submissions to be included in the electronic

⁵ Director-General Dr Jim Watterson, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland Government, *Submission 7*, 1.

⁶ Secretary Mr Colin Pratt, Department of Education, Tasmania Government, *Submission 11*, 1.

⁷ Minister for Education Hon. Peter Collier MLC, Department of Education, Western Australia Government, *Submission 4*, 1.

⁸ Hon. Peter Collier MLC, *Submission 4*, 1.

newsletter that is sent out weekly to every government school. The call for submissions was included in the Department's newsletter on two occasions.

The Committee also arranged for notice of the Inquiry and the subsequent hearings to be included in the Parliament of Victoria's twitter feed.

The Committee then commenced a detailed and extensive literature review, identifying a wide range of material. Much of the literature was based in other countries, namely the United States and Europe, however many of the issues raised were universal and are likely to be replicated in Australia. There is limited research undertaken in Australia, however a book published in 2012 by two Australian academics, *Reforming Homework*, provided valuable context for the inquiry. This book has been the basis of Queensland's homework policy and its authors, Associate Professor Richard Walker and Professor Michael Horsley, appeared before the Committee during public hearings.

By the deadline the Committee had received 32 submissions from a range of stakeholders. The submissions were published on the Committee's website. From the submissions, a number of potential witnesses were identified and letters were sent inviting them to attend public hearings. A full list of submissions is provided at Appendix A. In addition, a number of key stakeholders were invited to appear even though they had not put in a submission because, in the Committee's view, they had perspectives that were important for the Committee to hear in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the many complex issues.

The public hearings for the inquiry were held on 28, 29 and 30 April 2014 and involved gathering evidence from 16 witnesses. In addition to Professors Walker and Horsley, the Committee heard evidence from Professor John Hattie, a leading Australian educational researcher, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Principals' associations, Parents Victoria and individual parents, various schools and schools' associations, teachers and students, the Education Union, and organisations involved with assisting students and families who are confronted with the additional challenges or disability, cultural or linguistics differences or socio-economic disadvantage. A full list of witnesses is provided in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 2: THE HOMEWORK DEBATE

Researchers have variously concluded that homework is beneficial or harmful, that homework has no effects, that it has complex effects or that the research is too sparse or too problematic to be able to justify the drawing of strong conclusions...⁹

Horsley and Walker

Homework has always been a fact of life for students. It has been assigned to complete work not completed in class, for revision of lessons, for practice of newly acquired skills, for preparation for tests and upcoming lessons, and even for punishment. It is rarely popular with students, and even some parents, but has been an accepted part of the school experience. However, despite the widespread use of homework as a learning tool, it has been a controversial issue among educators for more than a century.

Prominent educational theorists have questioned homework's effectiveness as a tool to enhance student learning and have pointed to the potential for negative effects on the development of other aspects of a student's life. These objections have been met with arguments from those who believe that it plays an important role in reinforcing learning, in developing study habits, self-discipline and time management skills and generally preparing students for a world where their success will depend, to a significant extent, on their effort.

Before outlining the debate in more detail, it is necessary to define what we mean by homework. Some students have access to further instruction outside of school hours through private tutoring, either individually or in colleges. This private tutoring is not considered homework for the purposes of this inquiry. This is firstly because they are discretionary and are not required by a teacher. In addition, private tutoring is effectively an additional layer of instruction and is therefore more than the revision, practice or preparation that is the usual focus of homework. Despite this issue falling outside the terms of reference of this inquiry, it has been raised as a matter of concern by some witnesses and the Committee considered that these concerns warranted some discussion in this report.

While there are many definitions in the literature of homework, the Committee considers the most useful, and most straightforward, is provided by Harris Cooper, Professor of Education and Chair & Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Duke University and the leading researcher on the subject in the USA over the past 30 years. Professor Cooper defined homework as:

Tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours.¹⁰

⁹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 14.

This covers the varying purposes of the homework, while ensuring there is a direct relationship between the student and their teacher. Therefore, it will be used as the definition of homework for this report. In evidence before the Committee in public hearings, one of the authors of the major Australian work on the subject, Professor Mike Horsley, told the Committee that this definition should not include studying for exams or the like. The reason for this is that these are not tasks specifically assigned to students but that they do according to their own needs.¹¹

The differences in perspective that emerge throughout the literature on the relative effectiveness of homework as a learning tool are reflected in the submissions received by the Committee. This is an issue that does not enjoy unanimity of opinion. The lack of consensus is further exacerbated by the limited and somewhat ambiguous empirical data available.

It is not possible from the available data to make unequivocal statements about the effectiveness of homework overall in assisting student learning. There are too many factors that need to be considered in making such judgments, including: the age and stage of the students; the subject matter; the purposes of the individual homework assignments; the ability of the individual student; the quality of the homework assignments; the socio-economic or cultural context of the student or school community and the support provided by the parents.

As stated in a research scan undertaken by the Government of New South Wales in 2012:

*Homework is affected by more factors than most other instructional strategies: the home environment, student aptitude, motivation, and age may all influence homework's effect favourably or otherwise.*¹²

Limitations in the available research have been identified in a number of papers. According to the NSW review, in addition to the above, there are a number of issues with the data available, including:

- Many of the studies are conducted by teachers themselves and may overestimate the effects of homework;
- Homework can serve various purposes and involve tasks of different quality, so comparisons may be invalid;
- There is a lack of high-quality quantitative research in this field with most studies being correlational not causal, so homework completion and achievement may be the result of other, unstudied variables;

¹⁰ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85.

¹¹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014.

¹² Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012). Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

- The self-reporting base of many studies raises issues of reliability of the data - students may exaggerate the amount of homework they do, parents may be absent when the children do their homework so they are not sure how much they do.

2.1 Background

Much of the literature and research upon which attitudes to homework have been based has, until quite recently, been undertaken in the United States. While there are clear differences between the education systems of the United States and Australia, there are enough cultural, economic and linguistic similarities to suggest that findings and conclusions made in US studies are broadly transferrable to an Australian context.

It has been suggested that homework has been controversial since the advent of mass compulsory schooling that began in English-speaking countries from the 1850s.¹³ A study carried out by Rice in the 1890s concluded that:

*... laborious devotion by children to their spelling homework bore no relation to later spelling ability.*¹⁴

Rice argued then that time spent on homework could be better spent on other activities. The views expressed by Reverend Rice in this early study reflect two of the key arguments against homework that have continued to the present day: that it is not effective in assisting learning and that it takes children away from other activities that help in their development, or more dramatically, homework's 'perceived threat to the physical, emotional, and mental health of the child'.¹⁵

This anti-homework sentiment has even led to official actions to limit it at various times. For example, in 1901 the Californian state legislature passed a law (California civil code, 1901) abolishing homework for children under the age of 15.¹⁶

During the 20th Century, there were several shifts in approaches to homework. For the most part, it was considered to be a necessary part of normal and effective schooling. However, a couple of periods saw a shift away from homework. These were, again, largely based on a belief that homework was not effective as a learning tool or that it had a negative effect on the holistic development of children.

In 1950, H.J. Otto wrote "compulsory homework does not result in sufficiently improved academic accomplishments to justify retention."¹⁷

¹³ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 1.

¹⁴ Ozkan Eren and Daniel J Henderson, 'Are we wasting our children's time by giving them more homework?' (2011) 5(30) *Economics of Education Review* 950, 950.

¹⁵ Etta Kralovec and John Buell, *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning* (2000) Beacon Press, 42.

¹⁶ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

¹⁷ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 85.

The launch of Sputnik by the Russians in the late 1950s reversed these attitudes as the public became worried that the US education system lacked the necessary rigour and left children unprepared to compete in a world that was increasingly technologically complex.

The late 1960s saw a move away from homework among some educators, as it was viewed as adding unnecessary pressure on students.

P.R. Wildman suggested in 1968 that “whenever homework crowds out social experience, outdoor recreation, and creative activities, and whenever it usurps time devoted to sleep, it is not meeting the basic needs of children and adolescents.”¹⁸

Economic change and the significant downturns of the 1970s again saw a shift in emphasis. The release of the US government report, *A Nation at Risk*, in 1983 suggested that higher standards in maths, science, English and foreign language instruction required increased homework and a much longer school year.¹⁹

Along with educationalists, it is clear that there is also some disagreement amongst parents. It has been suggested in one study²⁰ that up to 20 to 30 per cent of parents considers that their children are getting too much homework.²¹ Conversely, it has also been suggested that most teachers, parents and students say doing homework helps students perform better in school. The public affairs journal *Public Agenda* reported that 83 per cent of parents and 53 per cent of teachers say that checking homework and encouraging learning is the best way for parents to be involved with their child’s education.²²

As suggested earlier, it is difficult to definitively answer the question “Does Homework assist learning?” However, it is useful to outline the arguments for and against homework. In the following sections, the Committee outlines these arguments and what factors may impact its effectiveness.

Much of the recent research undertaken into homework has relied on or referenced to some degree the work done by Professor Harris Cooper of Duke University. Professor Cooper is an educational psychologist who over the past 30 years has undertaken a number of meta-analyses of homework studies. It should be noted that as a proponent of homework as a learning tool, Professor Cooper’s findings and conclusions are not universally supported. However, he is the most cited researcher on the subject.

In the most important recent work, Horsley and Walker’s *Reforming Homework*, which was described by another leading educational researcher during the inquiry as ‘still the best,

¹⁸ Harris Cooper, ‘Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework’s effectiveness’ (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 85.

¹⁹ John Buell, *Closing the book on homework: Enhancing public education and freeing family time* (2004) Temple University Press, 50.

²⁰ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers.

²¹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 5.

²² District Administration, ‘Taking a closer look at homework’ (2004) 2(40) *District Administration* 65, 65.

most recent book in the world'²³, the authors highlighted the ambiguous nature of the research, suggesting:

Researchers have variously concluded that homework is beneficial (Cooper et al) or harmful (various), that homework has no effects (Kohn), that it has complex effects or that the research is too sparse or too problematic to be able to justify the drawing of strong conclusions...²⁴

2.2 The Case for Homework

A Government White Paper published by the UK Government in 1997 stated that:

... homework is not an optional extra, but an essential part of a good education. There is clear evidence that it helps pupils – in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds – reach higher standards.²⁵

This view is not universally held and there are elements of it that will be vehemently debated. Changes to education theory and practice over the past two decades may challenge its overarching confidence. However, there is still a strongly held view in most education systems that homework plays a significant role in modern education.

A number of reasons for assigning homework have been put forward during the inquiry, both in the general literature, in submissions and in the evidence given in the public hearings.

Epstein and Van Voorhis in 2001 suggested 10 reasons for the setting of homework:

- Practice;
- Preparation;
- Participation;
- Personal development – a sense of responsibility and the skills of independent, self-directed learning;
- Parent – child relations;
- Parent – teacher communications;
- Peer interactions – homework may be designed to promote learning through peer interaction and cooperative group learning;
- Policy – homework may be set to fulfil the requirements of school departments or other bureaucratic requirements;
- Public relations – homework set to promote an image of the school or class; and
- Punishment.²⁶

²³ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

²⁴ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 14.

²⁵ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) Stationery Office, 7.

²⁶ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 8.

In *Reforming Homework*, Walker and Horsley identify a number of learning oriented reasons for doing homework. These include:

- improving understanding of classwork;
- getting good grades;
- opportunities to practice skills;
- preparation for the next lesson;
- help in developing good discipline;
- independent learning skills; and
- help in developing time management and study skills.²⁷

Professor Horsley told the Committee in a public hearing that of the ten main purposes for homework as listed above, most of the research focussed on three main purposes:

- 1 Does homework actually enhance student learning and academic achievement?
- 2 Does homework help to develop skills of independent, self-directed learning in students?
- 3 Is parental involvement in their children's homework beneficial for student achievement and for the development of independent learning skills?²⁸

Elsewhere it has been suggested that legitimate purposes for homework include:

- introducing new content;
- practicing a skill or process that students can do independently but not fluently;
- elaborating on information that has been addressed in class to deepen students' knowledge; and
- providing opportunities for students to explore topics of their own interest.²⁹

This indicates that proponents of homework consider that it is not beneficial only when it is used for repetition and rote learning but that it can be used to enhance student's engagement with their learning.

This view was supported in the public hearings by a number of witnesses. The Committee was told by Mr Glenn Butler, Deputy President of the Victorian Principals' Association that:

*... homework has the potential to complement and consolidate classroom learning, and it provides an opportunity for students to take responsibility for their learning. We believe that homework should always be stimulated and relate directly to the classroom-based learning.*³⁰

The Committee heard evidence from Professor John Hattie, one of Australia's leading educational researchers, that the question to ask is not whether homework works, because

²⁷ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 9.

²⁸ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 3.

²⁹ Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering, 'The case for and against homework' (2007) 6(64) *Educational Leadership* 74, 7.

³⁰ Mr Glenn Butler, Deputy President, Victorian Principals Association, and Principal, Ormond Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 3.

almost everything works, but what difference does it make – what is the magnitude of its effect. Professor Hattie told the Committee:

*Virtually everything works, and that is the place at which I want to put homework. Homework works, and that is totally uninteresting, because everything does.*³¹

Professor Hattie expressed the view that the magnitude of the difference told us more than a blanket statement that there was a difference. He suggested that almost everything that was done to assist children in education made some difference because their effect is greater than zero, but he stated that about 50 per cent of things done to assist had an effect of 0.4. That is, the average effect is 0.4. The average effect of Homework for high schools students is 0.5, which is above average and could be argued to have a positive effect on performance. On the other hand, Professor Hattie argued that for primary school this figure is much lower, approximately 0.05, which is statistically insignificant and it could be argued has no meaningful effect.³²

Professor Hattie did not suggest, however, that homework should be abandoned for primary schools. He recognised that the direct effect on educational outcomes was not the only reason for homework. His point was that the low impact at primary school level means there is a significant opportunity for improvement. He told the Committee:

*My point is that because the effect of how we do homework traditionally is so close to zero in primary schools, then what a wonderful opportunity to do it better. We cannot fail by not doing it better, because it is so hopeless as it is.*³³

A few of the suggested benefits of homework have been recurring themes and these will be the focus of this section. In particular, the Committee will focus on the issues of practice and preparation, personal and academic development and engagement with parents, both between the child and the parent and the school and the parent.

2.2.1 Practice and Preparation

In his 1989 study, Harris Cooper suggested that homework assisted immediate achievement and learning student learning by:

- Better retention of factual knowledge;
- Increased understanding;
- Better critical thinking, concept formation, information processing; and
- Curriculum enrichment.³⁴

The belief that homework assists in the retention of factual knowledge by repetition is widely held by proponents of homework. In its submission to the inquiry, the Victorian

³¹ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

³² Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

³³ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

³⁴ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85.

Principals' Association stated that there are physiological reasons for repetition to assist in learning. It suggests that:

The neurological reason for having homework is rehearsal. New material is retained in the hippocampus for 24 hours and then it fades. If learning is not revisited and rehearsed, then the chances of it being transferred into the long term memory is severely diminished unless the person has an eidetic memory.³⁵

To the extent that any skill is enhanced by practice and repetition, it is reasonable to assume that where homework is reinforcing either skills or facts covered in class, it is likely to be more effective than if it is dealing with new material that may require explanation. In a major survey of senior teachers carried out by the Office for Standards in Education in the UK, both secondary and primary teachers saw the consolidation of skills taught in class as one of the main purposes of homework.³⁶

Several submissions stressed the role of consolidation of material learned in class as a main benefit of homework. Ms Paula Hayes suggested that students also need to revise, so that information and concepts 'stick' in their long term memories.³⁷ In its submission, the Waverley Christian College listed 'consolidation and reinforcement (practice) of knowledge, understanding, concepts and skills learnt from class' as the primary purpose of homework in enhancing student achievement.³⁸

The revisionary element of homework was supported by students in submissions, with a student contributing to the submission by the Victorian Student Representative Council suggesting that:

The value of homework to my learning is that it enables me to revise and improve on my knowledge, whilst being more independent. It also encourages me to seek help or further research via other sources, rather than relying on a teacher.³⁹

Further support for the view that homework reinforces learning was provided in the submission of the Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) which suggested that its homework policy was based, in part, on the belief that

... the completion of homework is essential to assist students to practice and apply the skills and knowledge they gain in preparation for scored assessments and the completion of examinations.⁴⁰

This view was reinforced in a public hearing, when the Assistant Principal of the BSSC, Ms Fettling, told the Committee that:

³⁵ Victorian Principals Association, *Submission 14*, 1.

³⁶ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) Stationery Office, 14.

³⁷ Ms Paula Hayes, *Submission 9*.

³⁸ Wantirna South Campus Primary Waverley Christian College, *Submission 18*.

³⁹ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 23*, 2.

⁴⁰ Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Submission 27*.

... at years 11 and 12 levels, we know — although we have not empirically measured it — anecdotally that the students who tend to do the work, the homework and the practice, correlate quite highly with outcomes.⁴¹

In a public hearing, Dr Michelle Cotter, of the Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, told the committee that a number of homework activities were of value, including ‘completing practice problems to build confidence in application style learning’.⁴² This reinforces the view that by repetition, students develop confidence in their skills which, in turn, will lead to better learning outcomes.

Professor Hattie also supported the value of ‘deliberate practice’ in homework, saying that it was more effective than assigning projects to students as homework. He told the Committee that:

... if you generalise to this notion of deliberate practice, you can do that in reading, you can do that in science and you can do that in social studies. It is a reinforcement of something that is taught.⁴³

Psychology Professor K. Anders Ericsson coined the term ‘deliberate practice’, in which he suggests that ‘Expert performance can... be traced to active engagement in deliberate practice (DP), where training (often designed and arranged by their teachers and coaches) is focused on improving particular tasks’ and which involves the provision of immediate feedback, time for problem-solving and evaluation, and opportunities for repeated performance to refine behavior.’⁴⁴ Deliberate practice usually involves expanding skills by applying them to more challenging tasks – as a task is mastered the level of difficulty is raised until the next level is mastered.

Professor Hattie is not referring to a ‘skill and drill’ type of homework which involves repetitive and unchallenging practice. He told the Committee that:

But I am not talking about skill and drill, because we know from the research on homework that has a zero to negative effect.⁴⁵

This view was echoed by Professor Horsley who suggested that the most common form of homework are ‘drill and practice’ type activities which, he suggests, have been shown to lead to lower achievement outcomes. This is, he argues, because autonomy and independent learning is an important element of effective homework and that:

If teachers are too controlling and if parents are too controlling, that has a negative effect on student learning in general but also on homework outcomes.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

⁴² Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 5.

⁴³ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

⁴⁴ K. Anders Ericsson, ‘Deliberate practice and acquisition of expert performance: A general overview’ (2008) 11(15) *Academic Emergency Medicine* 988.

⁴⁵ K. Anders Ericsson, ‘Deliberate practice and acquisition of expert performance: A general overview’ (2008) 11(15) *Academic Emergency Medicine* 988, 3.

The view that homework's value goes beyond practice was put to the Committee by the representatives of the Mathematical Association of Victoria, who suggested that along with the value of repetition of previously learned material, homework can encourage creativity and a deeper engagement. In its submission the Association suggested that homework:

Need not be just practice and rote learning of mathematics formulas – good homework practice should encourage imagination, exploration and play, with Lego, PlayStations and gameplay being in the mix.⁴⁷

The Association also suggested that the practice of homework could be “flipped”, where classroom time is spent practicing lessons learned from research and personal learning during homework time. The concept of the “flipped” classroom, which is gaining some momentum among progressive educators, refers to the concept whereby students do some of the initial work outside of the classroom by watching videos or other recorded material, before discussion and further exploration of the subject takes place in the classroom. This issue is addressed in more detail later in this Report.

It is clear from the responses in the public hearings that it is not simply hours of homework that need to be considered. In fact, measurement of hours can be misleading and says very little about the effectiveness of homework. In designing a homework policy, the types of homework need to be planned to achieve the desired outcomes.

2.2.2 Personal and non-academic development

Another widely cited benefit of homework is that it enhances the capacity of children to be self-motivated, disciplined and manage their time effectively when confronted with competing demands. While these skills are important in an academic context, and become more important as a student progresses along the academic path, they are equally important for the child's overall development. It is also suggested that the development of these characteristics improves the child's confidence and efficacy in all areas of their life. Cooper has suggested that for primary age children, where the effect of homework on academic achievement is less clear, the development of these characteristics is a significant reason for the assigning of homework by teachers. In particular, he suggests that the evidence available indicates that ‘teachers in early grades may assign homework more often to develop young students’ management of time.’⁴⁸

This was supported in evidence given in a public hearing by a representative of the Department, who told the Committee that one of the benefits of homework was the

⁴⁶ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

⁴⁷ The Mathematical Association of Victoria, *Submission 31*.

⁴⁸ National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, *Homework: What the research says* (2008), 2. Available at <http://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/Research_News_and_Advocacy/Research/Clips_and_Briefs/Brief%20-%20Homework%20What%20Research%20Says.pdf> viewed 16 June 2014.

development of ‘a range of self-regulation skills, such as time management and responsibility for learning’.⁴⁹

The Committee was also advised by the Department that it has developed a publication for parents called *Welcome to Secondary School 2012 — A Parent’s Guide to Victorian Government Secondary Schools*, which provides practical advice ‘time management tips’ and encourages the use by the child of a school diary, the creation of to-do lists and drawing up a simple home timetable using a calendar to ‘plan activities, list exam dates and other commitments, list due dates for essays’ and the like.⁵⁰

A view expressed in a number of submissions and by witnesses in the inquiry was that homework encourages ‘good study habits’ and it was also suggested that it helps the development of ‘problem-solving and application of thinking skills’.⁵¹

The capacity of homework to expand the capacity to think was also a common theme, with Dr Cotter, from the Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools Principals’ Association, telling the Committee that:

*Homework is believed to serve a purpose when it consolidates or extends student learning, skills and aptitude. Homework should enhance a student’s capacity to understand and apply concepts, skills and knowledge.*⁵²

The Committee also heard that the period of reflection offered by homework, after the lesson and away from the school environment, allows students to further develop their ideas. Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum at MacRobertson Girls’ High School, suggested that:

*Sophisticated and abstract ideas need time to develop outside the classroom, and homework is an ideal forum for students to consider and weigh up ideas creatively and synthesise new concepts.*⁵³

This view was expanded on by the Principal of MacRobertson Girls’ High School, Dr Toni Meath, who told the Committee that homework’s greatest strength was that it represented a ‘space for the curious mind to reflect on, ponder and work out what they have done at school’ with the assistance of their teacher and the ‘scaffolded learning’ means they can then add to their understanding and knowledge when they get home.⁵⁴

There was also a recognition in some submissions that learning was not something that was limited to the classroom and that homework helped students understand that it was a life-

⁴⁹ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 2.

⁵⁰ Ms Rosemary Roberts, Manager Planning and Assessment, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 6.

⁵¹ Victorian Principals Association, *Submission 14*, 1.

⁵² Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 5.

⁵³ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

⁵⁴ Dr Toni Meath, Principal, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

long and on-going process and that they bore responsibility for their own learning. The Catholic Schools Parents Body told the Committee in its submissions that:

*It is important that children understand that learning is an ongoing process throughout their lives and have the skills to embrace and undertake that learning. Homework is one way that students can learn self discipline to study and to invest in their own education.*⁵⁵

Dr Cotter of the Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools highlighted a range of skills that are developed through homework, including 'Organisational skills, independence in exploring new ideas, confidence in problem solving, time management and communication'.⁵⁶

The confidence that can flow from taking responsibility for learning and from improving academic performance by completing homework was also a common theme in both the literature and in submissions. The development of self-efficacy, or the the degree to which a person believes themselves able to organise, execute and adapt strategies to meet desired outcomes, is considered to be an important element of student well-being.⁵⁷ It is argued that the responsibility to complete homework, to organise time and to meet deadlines independently through homework completion can have the effect of strengthening self-efficacy and developing the student's confidence in his or her own capacity.

Supporting this position, BSSC in its submission suggested that it believed that there is a:

*... strong relationship between results achieved, learning confidence and the completion of homework.*⁵⁸

The view that homework assists students in developing self-discipline and other non-academic life skills was supported by students themselves, as seen through the Victorian Student Representative Council submission. The Council canvassed student views prior to making its submission and found through the responses that students primarily thought that homework was valuable in developing self-discipline and self-motivation. A quote from its submission suggested that:

*It keeps us from getting lazy. It helps us in preparing for the future, when one day we will have to do homework for our workplace.*⁵⁹

Professor Walker in a public hearing told the Committee that 'part of the purpose of schooling is to help develop self-directed learning skills in the classroom, but they also need self-directed learning skills at home'.⁶⁰ He suggested that while the effects of homework on

⁵⁵ Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 20*, 2.

⁵⁶ Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 6.

⁵⁷ Julian Fraillon, *Measuring student well-being in the context of Australian schooling: Discussion paper*, The Australian Council for Educational Research (2004), 33. Available at <http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Measuring_Student_Well-Being_in_the_Context_of_Australian_Schooling.pdf> viewed 1 July 2014.

⁵⁸ Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Submission 27*.

⁵⁹ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 23*.

⁶⁰ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 3.

academic performance for younger children are not particularly significant, the same may not be true for the issue of developing 'self-directed learning skills'.⁶¹

He told the Committee that it is difficult to say whether doing homework develops self-directed learning skills or whether students with self-directed learning skills tend to do their homework. He said in a public hearing:

*There is definitely a relationship between homework and self-directed learning skills, but because it is correlational research we cannot say what causes what.*⁶²

He suggested that homework alone may not be sufficient for the development of these skills, but that other structures may need to be in place to help teach these skills, such as homework or learning centres. He told the Committee that:

*We cannot necessarily assume that students will have the self-directed learning skills to do homework unless they get assistance with developing those skills.*⁶³

One type of structure that can assist students with the development of these skills is the homework club. Further discussion about homework clubs or centres takes place in Chapter Six of this report.

It should be noted that much of the evidence about the positive effects of homework on non-academic skills development such as responsibility, self-discipline and motivation is intuitive or anecdotal, as there has been little research done on it.⁶⁴ Most of the research that has been done is correlational research based on quantitative analyses comparing homework hours with academic achievement.

In addition to the non-academic skills that may develop from homework, there is also a view that in primary school one of the key reasons for homework is to develop study skills that will be essential for success in the later years of schooling. To this extent, the assigning of homework in primary school can be seen as part of a transition to the greater complexities to be confronted in secondary school and beyond.

Professor Horsley told the Committee that:

*That tends to be a feature of primary education — that teachers are aware that there is going to be a change and new skills are required.*⁶⁵

This transitional role for homework is an important perceived benefit. This view is not only expressed by educators and researchers, but also by students themselves. The Committee

⁶¹ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 4.

⁶² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

⁶³ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

⁶⁴ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012), 5. Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

⁶⁵ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 31.

was told by a representative of the Victorian Student Representative Council that in response to a survey undertaken by the VSRC students that indicated that more work is needed in the later years of primary school to gradually prepare students for the demands of secondary school so 'it is not such a shock'.⁶⁶ The view was also expressed in the hearing that this transition can be inadequate, with a VSRC Representative, Tess, a year 12 student, telling the Committee that:

*Some students feel that they did not have as much preparation. They said that in the later years of primary school — grades 5 and 6 — it should have been almost as if it was like an integration into the senior years. I remember that when I was in year 7 it was a bit of a surprise.*⁶⁷

2.3 The Case Against Homework

While there is a substantial body of opinion that homework is generally beneficial to students' learning, and this is reflected in most education systems to a greater or lesser extent, there is also a strongly held view, by educators and parents, that homework is of either limited value or, in some cases, can have negative effects on students.

The case against homework, in the first instance, is based not on evidence of its negative effects, but on the perceived absence of evidence that it actually aids learning. By this argument, if there are no clear benefits, then the potential damage it can do in adding to pressure on young people already under developmental stress, taking young people away from family and other relationships, impinging on time for extracurricular activities that have health and social benefits and in widening the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students, makes homework not worth doing.

As suggested by Alfie Kohn, one of the most vociferous and widely cited critics of homework in the United States:

*... the burden of proof here doesn't rest with critics to demonstrate that homework doesn't help. It rests with supporters to show that it does, and specifically to show that its advantages are sufficiently powerful and pervasive to justify taking up children's (and parents and teachers) time, and to compensate for the distinct disadvantages...*⁶⁸

Another argument against homework is, again, a repudiation of the argument that it assists in providing parents with an understanding of the work being done by their children. Critics of homework and this particular argument suggest that parents could be informed about what their children are doing at school simply by children showing them the assignments that they have been doing in class. It is suggested that getting them doing homework provides no more information than conversations that parents and children could have.

⁶⁶ Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

⁶⁷ Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

⁶⁸ Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 46.

Critics also question the value of homework as anything other than improving test marks. They argue that the development of other life skills such as self-discipline or time management skills through homework is overstated. Kohn argues that the choice of when to do homework is often made by the parent rather than the student and, in many cases, the student is required to complete the homework before being allowed to do something more enjoyable.⁶⁹ This, it is argued, is simply another form of compulsion and does not represent self-discipline or a sense of personal time management.

It has also been argued that this role of 'homework policing' by parents creates tensions in the family that arise because of the resentment of children, particularly in adolescence, of further loss of autonomy.

This point is further supported in submissions to the inquiry. It is argued that homework can cause the relationship between child and parent to suffer as parents have to take on the role of 'homework police', and need to monitor their children's homework activities.

A submission from Yvonne Kelley and Michael Barr, parents and former teachers, stated that:

Our personal family experiences tell us that homework often places undue pressure on families, with parents becoming 'homework police' as they try to ensure their students meet their competing demands...⁷⁰

Critics of homework also argue that it limits unnecessarily other forms of personal development of children.⁷¹

2.3.1 A lack of evidence

In suggesting that there is a lack of definitive evidence about the benefits of homework, Kohn has suggested in his major work, *The Homework Myth*, that:

... the conclusions of more than a dozen reviews of the homework literature conducted between 1960 and 1989 varied greatly. Their assessments ranged from homework having positive effects, no effects, or complex effects to the suggestion that the research was too sparse or poorly conducted to allow trustworthy conclusions.⁷²

⁶⁹ Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 53.

⁷⁰ Ms Yvonne Kelley and Mr Michael Barr, *Submission 19*, 1.

⁷¹ John Buell, *Closing the book on homework: Enhancing public education and freeing family time* (2004) Temple University Press, 6.

⁷² Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 25.

Supporting this perception of the confusing and ambiguous nature of the research findings, John Buell has suggested that:

*... for a practice as solidly entrenched as homework, the scholarly case on its behalf is surprisingly weak and even contradictory.*⁷³

Buell goes on to suggest that

*... much of the popular media's support for homework is based on the assumption that the practice has been tested and found essential to academic success. Yet scholarly studies of homework's ability to deliver in even such short-term and narrow areas as test scores and grades yield at best uneven results.*⁷⁴

In relation to the issue of the evidence purporting to support homework as a learning tool, critics suggest that typically homework studies confuse grades and test scores with learning.⁷⁵ It is suggested that preparation for in-class tests and the resultant improvement in grades may not equate to learning, as material learned for such a specific purpose may not have a broader context, may not be accompanied by the development of broader analytical thinking or skills and may be forgotten very soon after the test. According to this argument, claims of homework assisting grades or test scores are more valid than those that suggest a broader learning benefit.

In his analysis of the data presented by Cooper and others, Kohn and others have suggested a number of reasons why there are serious doubts about homework enhancing genuine learning. These include:

- At best, most homework studies show only an association, not a causal relationship between time spent on homework and improvement in academic achievement;
- Do we really know how much homework kids do? Many of the studies used to measure homework relied upon self-reporting by students and, in some cases, when parents reported their children's homework times, there were differences with what their children were reporting;
- As discussed earlier, homework studies confuse grades and test scores with learning;
- Homework matters less the longer you look – even the strongest correlational studies reported either very small or no correlations between homework and academic achievement for elementary or primary school students;
- Even where they do exist, positive effects are often quite small and there is significant room for argument that they do not justify the effort required; and
- The results of national and international exams raise further doubts about homework's role, with some of the higher achieving countries such as Finland having a reduced emphasis on homework as a learning tool.⁷⁶

⁷³ John Buell, *Closing the book on homework: Enhancing public education and freeing family time* (2004) Temple University Press, 9.

⁷⁴ John Buell, *Closing the book on homework: Enhancing public education and freeing family time* (2004) Temple University Press, 9.

⁷⁵ Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 30.

⁷⁶ Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 28.

The attitude of Finland, a consistent leader in international educational performance, is interesting. According to Pasi Sahlberg, author of a recent book about the Finnish education system, Finnish educators see little value in homework if it consists of ‘routine and intellectually unchallenging drills, as school homework assignments unfortunately often are’.⁷⁷ In fact, he suggests that according to international studies, Finnish primary and lower secondary students ‘have the lightest homework load of all’, with some estimates suggesting that Finnish students rarely do more than half an hour per day.⁷⁸

While the Finnish model is not necessarily transferrable to other jurisdictions, as there are a number of elements of its education system that will be contributing to its high level of education achievement, what its approach to homework does is further confirm the ambiguity of the conclusions of studies on homework.

2.3.2 The equity issue

One of the most significant arguments against homework is based on a perception that it can increase the gap between educationally disadvantaged students and those that are not disadvantaged. Disadvantage may be related to cultural or linguistic disadvantage, socio-economic disadvantage or mental or physical disability. This issue is addressed in detail in a later chapter of this report. In essence, the argument suggests that where homework is supported by the family, both in terms of an appropriate space, the necessary physical and technological resources and in emotional and psychological support, a student is likely to be able to both complete homework and may gain benefit from it.

The corollary of this is that where the necessary structural support is not in place, the student will be less able to complete the work, or it may take longer. This is, it is argued, likely to increase the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. In 2012, the president of the French Teachers’ organisation stated that homework reinforces socio-economic and educational inequalities.⁷⁹ To the extent that the homework is compulsory and forms part of an assessment regime, this inequity will have an impact not only on learning, but on grades as well.

Homework and the equity issues related to it are discussed in more detail in Chapter Six.

⁷⁷ Pasi Sahlberg, *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* (2012) Hawker Brownlow Education, 65.

⁷⁸ Pasi Sahlberg, *Finnish Lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland?* (2012) Hawker Brownlow Education, 65.

⁷⁹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 4.

CHAPTER 3: INTERNATIONAL HOMEWORK COMPARISONS

The evidence base regarding the benefits or otherwise of homework is not well developed at this point. Results to date lack coherence. They are complex and oftentimes conflicting in the views that we have received.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

One of the difficulties in making an empirical assessment of the effectiveness of homework as a learning tool is that while there have been a large number of studies done, they are often not directly comparable and have different and often contradictory findings. They ask different questions, have different and often very specific samples and, according to researchers such as Harris Cooper, who has undertaken major meta-analyses of many of the studies, most have significant methodological flaws.⁸⁰

The lack of solid empirical data upon which to base homework policies has been acknowledged in both submissions and in evidence given in public hearings. In submissions, references were made to the controversy over the evidence supporting homework,⁸¹ that there is ‘no solid evidence of homework producing better academic achievement’⁸² and that some parents and teachers want homework to be assigned because they think it is helpful even though they ‘don’t have any real evidence for holding such a view’.⁸³

Despite this lack of data, the Principals Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools told the Committee in a public hearing that academic success in Catholic Schools ‘acts as evidence supporting individual school approaches to homework’.⁸⁴ The correlation and causal links between an individual school’s academic achievement and its approach to homework is one that only the individual school can make. However, such links tend not to be generalised across schools, regions or jurisdictions.

The difficulties in making direct causal links between academic achievement and homework is a common theme in many of the studies. In the case of international data, different cultural and educational practices can make direct comparisons difficult and potentially misleading. This is discussed in the next section.

⁸⁰ Harris Cooper, ‘Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework’s effectiveness’ (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85.

⁸¹ Australian Education Union Victorian Branch, *Submission 30*, 2.

⁸² Parents Victoria, *Submission 25*, 4.

⁸³ Ms Jacinta Cashen, *Submission 6*, 2.

⁸⁴ Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 5.

In developing its guidelines, the Department acknowledged in a public hearing that:

*The evidence base regarding the benefits or otherwise of homework is not well developed at this point. Results to date lack coherence. They are complex and oftentimes conflicting in the views that we have received.*⁸⁵

The Department went further, telling the Committee that:

*...there is little evidence as to whether homework improves student attitudes to learning or achievement.*⁸⁶

While this does reflect the bulk of the available research findings, particularly in the case of primary school-age students, it does not mean that homework is not effective. It simply means that empirical data is not available to prove its effectiveness.

One of the concerns that the Committee has is that Homework guidelines and expectation set by the Department are being produced in an ‘information vacuum’. While the Department has advised that it has ‘been doing some continuing work on checking the research and evidence base behind homework’, as part of its ‘evidence-based approach to improving student learning outcomes’,⁸⁷ it has also acknowledged that the guidelines have not been up-dated for 7 years. It is also relying in a large part on external research that may have limited application in Victoria.

This means that school communities are expected to develop homework policies without much empirical data. As a result, homework policies may be being developed largely based on general perceptions and assumptions, parents’ and teachers’ personal experiences or historical practice. It would be very helpful for school communities if the Department could develop an assessment framework which would enable schools to evaluate their own policies. One of the problems with assessing the effectiveness of a homework policy is that there is a tendency to mandate an input, usually a minimum recommended number of hours of homework by age or grade level, and then making assumptions about its effectiveness based on a student’s results.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That the Department urgently reviews its homework guidelines and provides schools with a framework for developing their policies which are based on a comprehensive review of current research.

⁸⁵ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 2.

⁸⁶ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 2.

⁸⁷ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 1.

It would be better practice if a school was required, or at least encouraged, to periodically evaluate its own policies against a range of criteria to ensure that it knows the homework being assigned is working. Professor Hattie told the Committee that:

What I would like to see as part of the homework guidelines is that ... schools are asked to provide evidence of the impact of their homework positively on their kids. Rather than prescribing a particular way of doing it, let us ask us them to provide evidence that the homework policy the school is adopting is improving the outcomes for kids.⁸⁸

3.1 International Comparisons

As in all elements of homework research, direct comparisons across international borders need to be treated with caution. It could be assumed that different cultures and national traditions will lead to differences in factors that affect the impact of homework. However, as suggested by Horsley and Walker, a lack of research comparing homework practices in different countries and cultures represents a substantial gap in the homework literature.⁸⁹

Much of the data that is available for international comparison comes from the two major international evaluations of student achievement, Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMMS).⁹⁰ These represent an international benchmarking system that attempt to provide a baseline for assessing the impact of international (as well as national) educational reforms. They focus on international student achievement in the key subjects of mathematics, science and reading. The studies are undertaken at set intervals and so provide comparisons both between countries and jurisdictions and over time. Both are large surveys and so provide a rich source of educational data – PISA takes place every 3 years and involves 400,000 15 year-old students from Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. TIMMS collects data from grade 4 and 8 students and involves approximately 500,000 students from more than 60 countries.

In their book, Horsley and Walker summarised PISA results, and their findings suggested:

- The national average for time spent on homework by students distracts attention from the major variations in homework practices between countries and between students and schools within countries;
- There are significant disciplinary differences between time spent on homework and other aspects of homework practice;
- Time reported for homework tends to be higher in countries with lower achievement;
- Total time reported for homework in hours positively correlated with achievement for all countries taken together in PISA;

⁸⁸ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 8.

⁸⁹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 102.

⁹⁰ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 231.

- Within each country the relationship between extra mathematics homework and student achievement on PISA tends to be negative across all education systems; and
- The small proportion of students reporting no time spent on mathematics homework have higher achievement than those who report some mathematics homework.⁹¹

Overall they suggested that the OECD PISA analyses support the conclusion that the relationship between homework and achievement is complex and contradictory.⁹²

Supporting the ambiguous nature of the data, the NSW Government scan found that a report analysing the data from the 2006 PISA program concluded that 51 per cent of 15-year-old students surveyed spent some time but less than two hours per week completing homework in science and mathematics. These percentages differed widely among countries – over 50 per cent of students in science in the partner countries of the Russian Federation, Jordan, Tunisia and Azerbaijan spent two hours or more doing homework or studying by themselves, while only 15 per cent or less of students in Japan, Finland, Denmark, Sweden did such study.⁹³

In the 2012 PISA report, some of the contradictions inherent in the process of comparing different systems become apparent.⁹⁴ For example, the highest number of homework hours undertaken per week were by students from Shanghai-China, at 13.8 hours per week.⁹⁵ The same students had the highest mean scores in all subjects - Maths, Reading and Science. This might seem to indicate a correlation between high levels of homework and academic performance. However, offsetting this is Korea, which is 5th best in the OECD in Maths and Reading and 7th in Science, and has the second lowest number of homework hours. Further, Finland, with the lowest number of homework hours in the 2012 PISA, were 12th in Maths, 6th in Reading and 5th in Science. This indicates that the very high standards established by students from Shanghai-China are likely to be the result of a number of factors and the causal relationship between their scores and the homework hours is not clear.

The uncertainty of the connection between homework and performance is further reinforced by the fact that Peru's homework hours are above the OECD mean score, and are significantly higher than either Korea or Finland, and yet the Peruvian students finished at the bottom of the 2012 PISA scores.

⁹¹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, ?

⁹² Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 244.

⁹³ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012), 7. Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

⁹⁴ The PISA data is more useful than the TIMSS figures in homework research because it measures scores for 15 year-olds, while the TIMSS data gathers results from younger students. It is generally agreed that the secondary school cohort provides a more useful set of data.

⁹⁵ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *PISA 2012 results: What makes schools successful? – Resources, policies and practices, Volume IV* (2013), 120. Available at <<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-IV.pdf>> viewed 1 July 2014.

Issues that could affect these scores may include but are not restricted to:

- National expenditure on education and teacher salaries;
- Pre-service and in-service training and qualification of teachers;
- Equity in resource allocation;
- Student learning time in classrooms and additional learning structures; after school and attendance levels;
- Student-teacher ratios;
- Cultural and linguistic diversity; and
- Socio-economic diversity.⁹⁶

Australia's homework hours were above the OECD average and were 16th overall. Its PISA rankings were 19th in Maths, 14th in reading and 16th in Science. Australia was one of only 4 countries whose homework hours increased over the 10 years 2003 to 2012.

Figure 1: Increases to Homework Hours and changes to Mean Scores in Maths, Reading and Science PISA 2012

Country	Change to HW Hours 2003 – 2012	Change in Mean Score Maths	Change in Mean Score Reading	Change in Mean Score Science
OECD	-1.0	-0.3	0.3	0.5
Austria	0.6	0.0	-0.2	-0.8
United States	0.4	0.3	-0.3	1.4
Australia	0.3	-2.2	-1.4	-0.9
Netherlands	0.1	-1.6	-0.1	-0.5
Japan	0.0	0.4	1.5	2.6

Source: PISA 2012

The Table above provides a further illustration of the confusion that data on academic performance and homework hours can cause. The OECD has seen an overall reduction in homework hours in the past decade, with a slight increase in performance in Reading and Science and a slight reduction in Maths performance. Over the same period, the United States has seen a slight rise in homework hours and an increase in Maths and Science performance, and a slight reduction in reading. Australia has slightly increased its homework hours, but has seen significance falls in performance in Maths, Reading and Science. Japan has seen no change to its homework hours, but has seen some significant increases in its performances in all subject areas.

These figures reinforce the view that attempts to use these kinds of figures to 'prove' the value or otherwise of homework, or at least hours of homework, are likely to be more confusing than enlightening.

⁹⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *PISA 2012 results: What makes schools successful? – Resources, policies and practices, Volume IV* (2013). Available at <<http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results-volume-IV.pdf>> viewed 1 July 2014.

A further illustration, and possibly a more stark one, of the difficulty in linking performance data from tests results to the hours of homework completed is shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4.. By overlaying the number of hours of homework against the mean test scores in the three disciplines, Maths, Reading and Science, it is clear that the correlations are, at best, inconsistent.

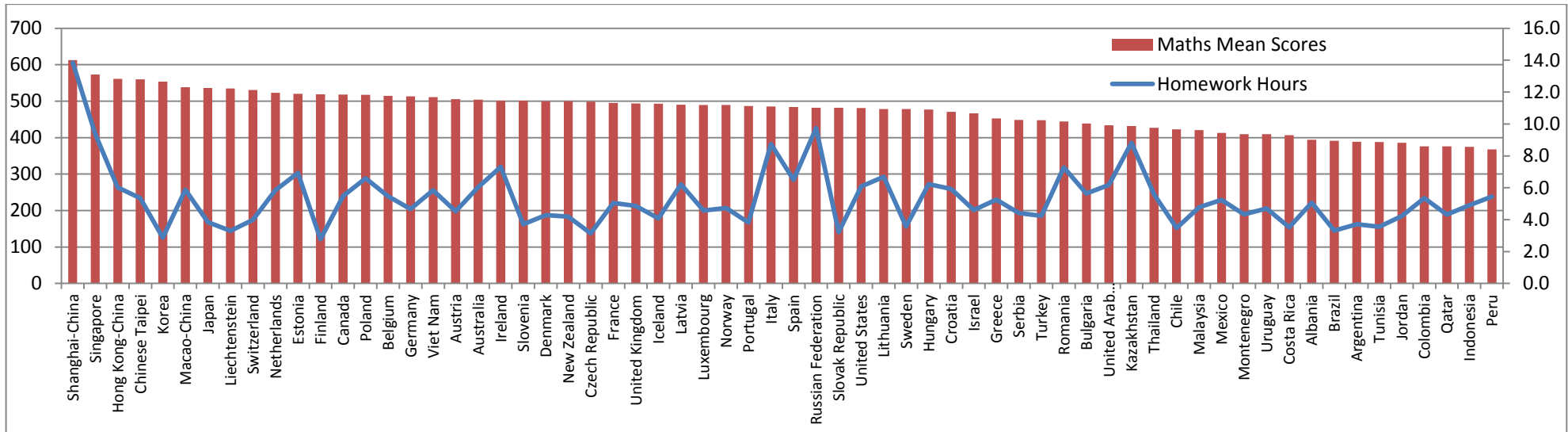


Figure 2: Homework Hours against 2012 PISA Scores in Maths

Source: PISA 2012

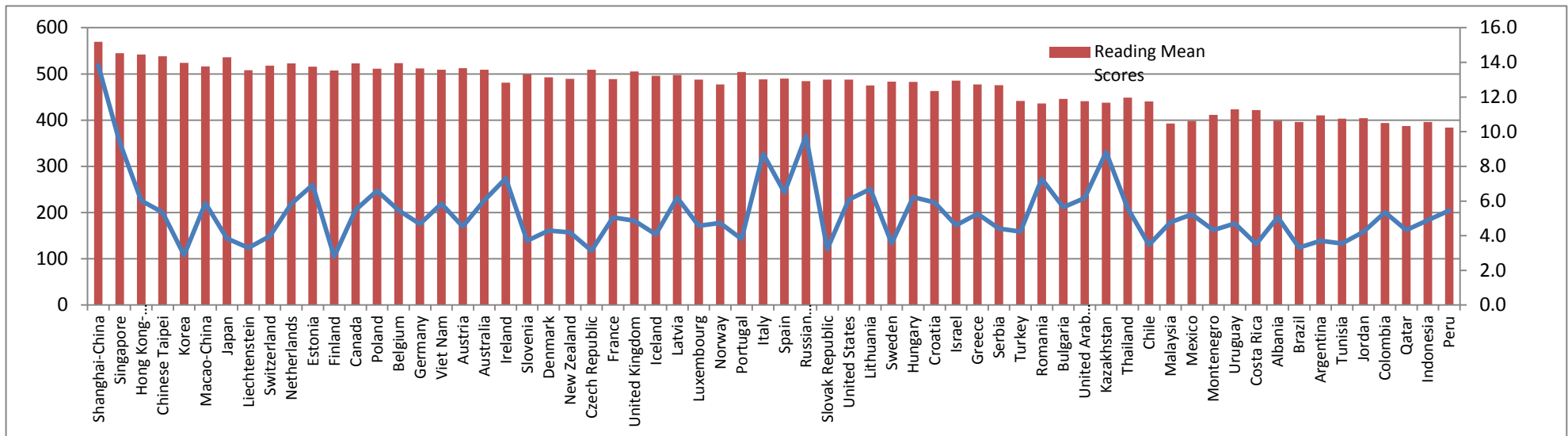


Figure 3: Homework Hours against 2012 PISA Scores in Reading

Source: PISA 2012

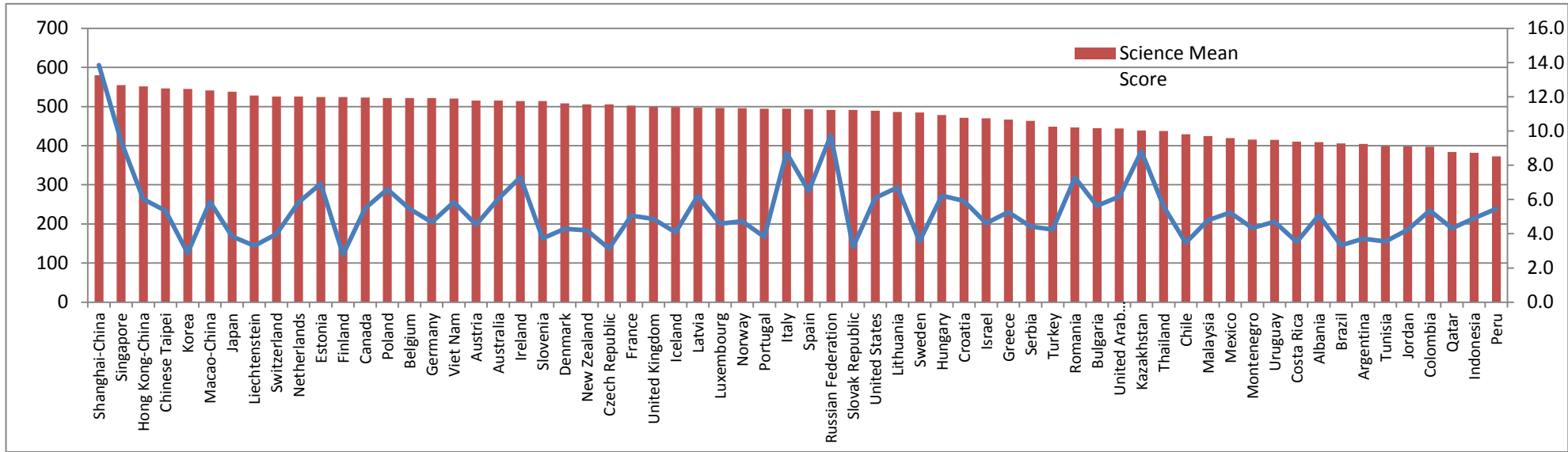


Figure 4: Homework Hours against 2012 PISA Scores in Science

Source: PISA 2012

The differences within the countries in the three disciplines are relatively limited overall and yet there is a very variable number of homework hours between countries. The homework hours line does not mirror the performance line and supports the view that there is very little direct correlation between homework hours and academic performance.

The effectiveness of homework is likely to remain a matter largely of perception. The multi-factorial nature of any measurement will always make broad statements of its value across cultural, socio-economic, age and ability levels highly problematic.

For this reason, it is essential that homework policy continues to be driven not by an ideological belief that it is 'a good thing' or a 'bad thing', but by the specific needs of the individual school community developing the policy.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the lack of a direct quantifiable correlation between homework hours and academic performance in the PISA 2012 data does not mean that homework is not effective in enhancing performance. It simply means that this data cannot be used to prove that it does.

There needs to be substantially more work done if we are to be able to show that there is a direct link between homework and academic performance. The Committee accepts that the Department does not have a role in establishing specific homework policies for schools, and in fact sees no role for itself in monitoring such policies. However, the Department's communication with and access to every government school places it in a unique position to assist schools in framing, developing and assessing their own policies.

The Department considers that the issue of homework and the need for schools to have their own homework policy is important enough to mandate such policies. Its *Homework Guidelines* stated purpose is to "ensure that school councils develop and publish a homework policy".⁹⁷ The *Homework Expectations* that are published with the Guidelines make some general statements that homework should support educational requirements, including that it should be:

- Appropriate to the student's skill level and age;
- Purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the curriculum;
- Interesting, challenging and when appropriate open-ended;
- Assessed by teachers with feedback and support provided; and
- Balanced with a range of recreational, family and cultural activities.

Homework policies will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

⁹⁷ Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (Victoria), *School policy & advisory guide: Curriculum*, <<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/Pages/curriculum.aspx?Redirect=1>> viewed 1 July 2014.

In addition to an evaluation template, until there is some meaningful comparative data that is relevant to the Victorian context, it is going to be difficult for schools to benchmark their own homework policies and thus gain a clear idea of whether they are assisting students' performance. The difficulties in establishing the levels of data required to make meaningful assessments of the effectiveness of homework have been discussed at length in this chapter. The Committee acknowledges that collecting the various data sets required to empirically show a causal link between homework and academic achievement would be a substantial project and would need to be undertaken over time.

However without such data, homework policies will continue to be based on untested assumptions and historical practice. The Department has the capacity to obtain information from schools and a detailed study with the cooperation of a broad sample of schools would assist future policy development, at both the governmental and schools level. Any project gathering data needs to include:

- Hours completed per week, broken down by:
 - Age and grade level; and
 - Subject area.
- Type of homework;
 - pre-prepared or commercial worksheets;
 - teacher assigned exercises based on work undertaken in class;
 - Essays;
 - projects, including research;
 - finishing work not completed in class.
- The extent to which homework is assessed or feedback is provided to students;
- The role undertaken by parents in the homework, broken down by grade level and subject;
- The requirement for information technology access in completion of homework assignments;
- The socio-economic, linguistic or cultural base of the schools from whom data is sought;

The academic results of the particular cohorts over time could be gathered to determine whether a causal relationship can be identified.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That the Department undertakes or commissions a project assessing the effectiveness of homework practice in Victorian schools based on gathered empirical evidence as highlighted in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 4: HOMEWORK PRACTICES IN VICTORIA

Schools and school councils develop their own policy to meet the needs and expectations of their school community and in consultation with their school community.

Department of Education and Early Childhood Education

4.1 School Homework Policies

4.1.1 Role of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Homework policies generally are an overview of what the homework requirements and expectations are at that school.⁹⁸ The Department advised that these expectations will increase over a student's academic life in preparation for large amounts of homework in years 11 and 12.

The expectation is that, when working towards the higher academic demands in senior secondary schooling, there would be some leading up so it is not actually a surprise when you get to year 10.⁹⁹

The Department encourages all schools to have a homework policy. It believes that such a policy allows schools to engage with their community.¹⁰⁰ To this end, the Department provides schools with a range of resources so they may develop and adopt a homework policy. These guidelines suggest the following is best practice:

Figure 5: Best Practice Guidelines

Prep to grade 4	Grade 5 to 9	Grade 10 to 12
Extends class work through practising skills or gathering extra information. Consists mainly of reading to/with parents and older siblings. Generally not exceed 30 minutes per day.	Should be coordinated across subjects. Extends class work through projects, assignments, essays and research. Will range from 30 to 45 min per day in grade 5 to 45 to 90 minutes per day in grade 9.	Will generally increase and require 1-3 hours per day with up to 6 hours on weekends during VCE.

Source: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/curriculum/pages/guidelines.aspx>

⁹⁸ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 13.

⁹⁹ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 5.

¹⁰⁰ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 3.

As discussed previously, homework is defined as tasks assigned by the teacher to be carried out in non-school hours.¹⁰¹ As such any personal study or revision for tests would be on top of these recommended amounts of homework. Homework should aid student learning and relate to what has taken place in the classroom.¹⁰² In Victoria most schools set homework in accordance with their homework policy. Although there is no research justifying the use of time to measure homework, these policies generally prescribe a certain number of minutes of homework for each year level.

The Department advised its role is not to intervene in the development or enforcement of these policies; rather it supports schools to have this conversation with its community.¹⁰³ As such the Department was unable to advise how many schools had a homework policy.

*Whilst we do not have that oversight of which school has which homework, they are also encouraged to publish those on their website. A quick scan of school websites, which we do for lots of different reasons and obviously on a random basis, has shown that most of them do have that.*¹⁰⁴

Once a school has adopted a homework policy, the Department suggests that this should not be a static document. It recommends that this policy should be reviewed every three to four years to ensure that it meets the needs, the expectations and is understood by the school community. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of homework policies, a school would need to undertake a review that might include lesson observations and the way homework is used, work sampling, staff and student responses, homework assessment and feedback practices, analysis of assessment data for individual students and for age and grade cohorts and planning sessions.

Issues that would need to be considered in addition to hours of homework assigned and completed might include the role played by parents in homework, the resources available to students in completing their homework, types of homework and difficulties encountered with different types of assignment such as requirement for further instruction, and, most importantly, identification of success/failure measures for the policy.

These tasks may well be beyond the capacity of individual schools because their limited resources are already likely to be stretched in meeting their educational objectives. Similarly, a comprehensive review of this type may also be asking too much of the Department, with the breadth of its responsibilities and the more than 2000 schools in its jurisdiction.

For this reason, the Committee suggests that it would be helpful for schools in reviewing, evaluating and up-dating their homework policies if the Department ran a pilot evaluation,

¹⁰¹ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 2.

¹⁰² Dr Ian Lillico, *Submission 12*, 3.

¹⁰³ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 4.

using a small sample of schools covering different age cohorts, regions and socio-economic and cultural communities. From this small sample, a set of usable evaluative tools could be developed and a template provided to schools. This way, in their regular policy review cycle a meaningful assessment of the educational value of their homework policy could be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION THREE

The Department should undertake or commission an evaluation of a selected number of homework policies in order to develop an evaluation template for schools to review their own policies on an on-going basis.

4.1.2 Role of school community in determining homework policies

In the absence of research underlying the decisions in a homework policy, other factors must influence and shape this policy. According to the Department, school councils take the lead in formulating the homework policy.

Schools and school councils develop their own policy to meet the needs and expectations of their school community and in consultation with their school community. School councils are responsible for developing and publishing a homework policy in partnership with the principal and teachers and after consultation with parents and students.¹⁰⁵

Based on the evidence received, the Committee is of the view that parents can be the largest influence on a school's homework policy. Michael Barr, a parent and former teacher, suggested to the Committee that in his experience parents fail to understand that the education system has advanced since they were at school – completing and comprehending key tasks is more important than undertaking copious amounts of repetitive work.

I found that parents always reflected back on what it was like when they were a child, so that was where their expectation came from. ... it was about saying to them, 'We will undertake to set homework if that's what you want, but we're not going to do busy work.'¹⁰⁶

Evidence to the Committee from Victoria's select entry schools noted that their student body is drawn from across the State, and as such may have long travel times. In addition many of these students were involved in extensive extracurricular activities, such as language schools on weekends. As such these schools advised that regardless of parental expectations they sought to limit the amount of homework assigned.

In many ways we try to work with parents to reduce the hours of homework more than expand them. Not only do we believe firmly this is in the best interests of students academically, but we think it is also important for their health and wellbeing.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ms Victoria Hall, Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Mr Michael Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 5.

¹⁰⁷ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

Not all schools share this view. Professor Horsley suggested to the Committee that some schools use their homework policy as a way of differentiating themselves from other schools. In this context the homework policy draws heavily on parental expectations to demonstrate a school's high academic standards and demands.

...some parents place a very high value on homework and some schools advertise themselves as setting large amounts of homework. In this context we see homework as an accountability measure for the quality of the school or as a proxy for the quality of the school.¹⁰⁸

The use of homework policies as a branding device to appeal to parental notions of how education should operate was also reflected in evidence received from Professor John Hattie:

Again they are appealing to the parents' notion of the importance of good old-fashioned hard work. Yes, I think that is part of their branding system.¹⁰⁹

According to this argument parents may select a school based on perceptions that it will offer 'good old-fashioned hard work'; alternatively parents may seek more homework for their children to ensure they understand what has been taught in the school. In this context homework is viewed as demonstrating that a child is succeeding at school.¹¹⁰ Although some schools try to educate parents about the current rationale behind homework and about the types of homework set, Professor Horsley suggested that some parents do not accept the research.¹¹¹ Professor John Hattie noted that some schools may feel pressure and assign homework, even though research has questioned the benefits of this type of homework.

I do not think it is worth battling the parents, because they see homework as something that is related to the quality of schooling.¹¹²

The Committee undertook a brief review of the websites of a number of the best performing private schools (based on university admission) and none of these websites made any explicit comment about the amount or type of homework to be assigned and any reference to homework was incidental. The low-key references to homework on the schools' websites do not mean homework is not emphasised in communications with parents. It does, however, suggest that homework is not used as an overt selling point.

The Committee received evidence from students that there is currently too much homework assigned in Victorian schools.¹¹³ This was reflected in a survey undertaken by the Victorian Student Representative Council. Students felt that excessive amounts of homework reduced the amount of time available for other pursuits.

¹⁰⁸ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

¹¹⁰ Ms Yvonne Kelley, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 6.

¹¹¹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 18.

¹¹² Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

¹¹³ Karen, Year 11 student, Mac. Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

The majority of students said that in some schools the homework load can be a bit too much, and without the balance between social life, the family and study, it can completely throw out the wellbeing of the student and can lead to stress.¹¹⁴

4.1.3 Issues relating to implementing a homework policy

Once a homework policy has been adopted, the school needs to ensure that homework is set in accordance with it. At the secondary level this requires different subject teachers to communicate with each other to ensure they are setting appropriate amounts of homework across the different subjects.¹¹⁵ Applying the homework policy requires a dialogue between both the students and their parents and parents and the school. The Committee received evidence from Professor Horsley that some teachers followed these policies, even when they questioned the benefit of the homework to a child's learning.

In a primary school the school will have a homework policy that all teachers must follow, but many teachers intuitively — I do not think they will be able to articulate it — probably believe at their core that a lot of this homework is not really effective in terms of achievement.¹¹⁶

In submissions to the Committee, some parents questioned the benefit of homework tasks set at the primary level. They considered the homework to be stand-alone tasks rather than reinforcing what had been taught in class.¹¹⁷ Meredith Fettling, the Assistant Principal at Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) suggested to the Committee that rather than contacting the school and asking more homework be set, parental inquires to the school about homework are generally to inquire about what has been sent or to confirm that their child has completed the task.

Parents will sometimes question the fact that their child does not seem to be doing anything and ask whether they have homework. I think it is more along the lines of parents not knowing what the students have to do as opposed to, 'Give us more'.¹¹⁸

4.1.4 Quality versus quantity

The Committee received evidence about what constitutes best practice in homework. This revolved around, quality, quantity, assessment and feedback.

The quality of the homework was the most important issue. In its evidence the Department suggested that quality homework should be meaningful, relevant and appropriate to the age and skill level of the student, and should be assessed by the teacher.

¹¹⁴ Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

¹¹⁵ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9; Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 13.

¹¹⁶ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

¹¹⁷ Ms Lynn Wakefield, *Submission 29*, 1.

¹¹⁸ Ms Meredith Fettling, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

*It should be appropriate to the student's skill level and age; purposeful, meaningful and relevant to the curriculum; interesting, challenging and, when appropriate, open ended; assessed by teachers with feedback and support provided for the student if necessary; and balanced with a range of recreational, family and cultural activities.*¹¹⁹

Professor Hattie suggested that high quality homework should relate to what was taught in the classroom, and have an element of challenge.¹²⁰ By way of contrast, Professor Horsley suggested that poor quality homework, or 'busy work', at primary school level consists of setting pre-prepared or commercial worksheets on Monday that were due on Friday



The quality of homework is more important than the quantity.

and that have no relevance to what was being taught in the class that week.¹²¹ This activity may ensure compliance with a school's homework policy, but does not relate to or reinforce what was taught in the classroom. It has been suggested that the existence of a homework policy may compel some teachers to assign such homework rather than setting it in response to the needs of the students.¹²²

*What the research shows pretty clearly is that high-quality homework involves some degree of challenge but is not too demanding. It does not take a lot of thought to figure that out, I do not think. Low-quality homework is poorly selected and poorly prepared.*¹²³

Setting quality homework does not mean an end to 'drill and practice'. When used appropriately drill and practice can be beneficial to a student's learning. The current usage generally involves students undertaking drill and practice in large amounts over a long period of time. However Professor Horsley advised that research suggests that it is most effective in short amounts over a long period of time.¹²⁴

Given time constraints in the classroom, an overcrowded curriculum and increasing demands on teachers' time, a lot of the homework currently set relates to revision. This is not quality homework. Quality homework does not just happen. It requires the teacher to consider and plan it when preparing lesson plans.¹²⁵ As discussed previously, ideally

¹¹⁹ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 3.

¹²⁰ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

¹²¹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

¹²² Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 167.

¹²³ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

¹²⁴ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 13.

¹²⁵ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

homework should be tailored to the individual learning needs of each student. This can be an impossible task for teachers. It was suggested that teachers would need assistance in order to individualise homework to meet each student's needs.¹²⁶ Mr James Rankin, Australian Education Union Victorian Branch Primary Sector Vice-President reflected on his experience as a primary school teacher – he advised that Government schools can have up to 30 children per class and that within each class the academic abilities of the students differ by as much as five to six years on the learning spectrum. Homework needs to be individualised to achieve the same learning outcomes for all students.

*You cannot hand out the same thing to 25 or 30 kids and expect them all to do the same, achieve and get the same outcome from doing that one task. It is essential that you individualise what students are doing and that you have the time to follow up.*¹²⁷

Students also acknowledged that homework tasks need to be adapted to accommodate each student's abilities and learning styles. Tess from the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) noted that homework needed to be more interactive, simulating and engaging.

... everyone learns very differently to each other. For some people questions and answers are great, but there should be the option for others, who find that would be easier for the information to sink in
...¹²⁸

4.1.5 Individual and Team Homework

The Committee looked at current approaches to individual versus team homework. It received evidence from students that the current approach for homework is for teachers to assign individual homework that either reinforces or revises what has been taught in the classroom.¹²⁹ In contrast group work may require students to cooperate and negotiate with each other.¹³⁰ However it was suggested to the Committee by the VicSRC that there is little evidence that group homework encouraged teamwork, applied learning or learning new concepts and ideas.¹³¹ The Committee also heard from parents that group homework poses a series of problems for students, parents and teachers, especially those from remote or regional areas. Group homework assignments require students to get together after school. Finding a suitable time and venue for all parties can prove difficult. Some children may have extracurricular activities, while distance may prove to be an obstacle for others. Lynn Wakefield, a parent, suggested in her written submission that group homework should be done at school as it can be stressful to coordinate a time outside of school.

¹²⁶ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 15.

¹²⁷ Mr James Rankin, Vice-President, Primary Sector, Australian Education Union Victorian Branch, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 25.

¹²⁸ Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

¹²⁹ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 23*, 2.

¹³⁰ Mr Shayne Keenan, *Submission 3*, 2.

¹³¹ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 23*, 2.

*Group assignments are extremely difficult and stressful for my children to manage, as they have sporting commitments during the week and both days of the weekend at times. It generally becomes stressful for both the children and the families who have constraints on their time.*¹³²

The idea that group work should be conducted during school hours has some merit. This arrangement would allow teachers to answer questions and ensure assignments remained focused. It would also allow the teacher to ensure that all students were doing their fair share of the work.¹³³

4.1.6 Assessment and feedback on Homework

An important part of the learning process associated with homework is feedback. Research suggests that students learn more when homework is returned promptly with feedback.¹³⁴ Feedback provides students with encouragement and reinforces the skills acquired.¹³⁵ In his evidence to the Committee, Professor Horsley suggested that providing students with feedback was critical in mastering new skills, as it allows students to track what they know and what they do not understand.

*Like any learning task, if there is no assessment and feedback, then it is really going to be difficult to learn and internalise the new knowledge and understanding, have cognitive growth and achievement and development. We believe that assessment and feedback are absolutely core for homework tasks...*¹³⁶

Research has shown that students are more likely to complete homework when they know it is being monitored and feedback provided.¹³⁷ Feedback can also be used by teachers to identify areas where students need further development, meaning lesson and homework plans can be adjusted accordingly.¹³⁸

*It must be that teachers who use homework to identify skill deficits – and then provide feedback to students about how to build up their skills – are using homework in the most effective way.*¹³⁹

A survey of homework practices in the United Kingdom indicated that of schools that had adopted a homework policy, three-quarters incorporated guidelines relating to the marking of homework. Of these policies only 35 per cent specified a timeframe for the return of this feedback.¹⁴⁰ This feedback does not have to be a grade, rather it could be comments that provide encouragement or identify areas requiring further development. A problem with assigning grades to homework is that they are imprecise. Kohn notes that the same piece of

¹³² Ms Lynn Wakefield, *Submission 29*, 1.

¹³³ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 152.

¹³⁴ Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 176.

¹³⁵ R. A Pendergrass, 'Is it really a basic?' (1985) 7(58) *The Clearing House* 310, 2.

¹³⁶ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

¹³⁷ Harris Cooper, *The battle over homework* (2007) Corwin Press, 79.

¹³⁸ Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 176.

¹³⁹ Baker and LeTendre cited in Bennett and Kalish *The case against homework* p53.

¹⁴⁰ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 34.

work may be graded differently by two different teachers, or even the same teacher at two different times.¹⁴¹

... a grade, as one writer put it long ago, is "an inadequate report of an inaccurate judgement by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite amount of material."¹⁴²

One problem associated with the assigning of grades to homework is that students may focus on the grade rather than the learning outcome. This means that when retested students may be able to demonstrate skills in the short term but are unable to do so in the longer term.

Research has shown that when students involve their egos in school and homework, seeking high grades rather than making the most of the material, they develop a work style that is ultimately maladaptive. This style reflects a surface approach to learning and understanding subject matter rather than a search for deeper meanings and ways to extend knowledge.¹⁴³

Providing feedback can be more difficult than assigning a grade and can occupy more of a teacher's limited time. Jacinta Cashen, a teacher, stressed this point in her written submission:

I found as a teacher that to operate at a high professional level it required about 54 hours a week plus an additional week of time that you have to find when it is report writing time.¹⁴⁴

Both pupils and parents like to know if the homework was completed correctly, what was good and what was lacking.¹⁴⁵ Providing feedback is particularly problematic for teachers in secondary schools who teach multiple subjects.¹⁴⁶ In his evidence Associate Professor Walker indicated that teachers in Australia experience similar difficulties in providing feedback on homework.

Providing every student with targeted feedback about their homework is very difficult for teachers, so it often falls between the cracks.¹⁴⁷

The Committee received evidence that in some subjects, such as mathematics, teachers may have students swap their homework with their person next to them, the teacher then reads out the answers and they cross mark each other's papers. There are several issues with this practice: it takes away from class time and, as Anne Williams from Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association noted, may result in students who are struggling with concepts due to a learning disability being bullied in the playground.

¹⁴¹ Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 32.

¹⁴² Alfie Kohn, *The homework myth: Why our kids get too much of a bad thing* (2006) Da Capo Press, 32.

¹⁴³ Lyn Corno, 'Looking at homework differently' (2000) 5(100) *The Elementary School Journal* 529, 532.

¹⁴⁴ Ms Jacinta Cashen, *Submission 6*, 5.

¹⁴⁵ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 37.

¹⁴⁷ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 8.

... for example, maths, they ask the kids to swap papers so that one person who is bright might be marking somebody's paper who has dyscalculia. Then in the playground they get things like, 'Oh, look at Amanda, she's a spasmo or a dumbo, because she didn't get her sums right'.¹⁴⁸

Inclusive classrooms have become the norm. As such teachers need to recognise the different abilities of each student and adapt their lesson plans accordingly.¹⁴⁹ Ideally homework would be individualised to meet each student's abilities.¹⁵⁰ Students accept that giving the same assignment to all students may be unfair, however they felt homework should be graded uniformly.¹⁵¹ This means rather than setting one assignment for a class a teacher may have to set several different tasks, however given teachers' time is already in great demand this may not be possible.

FINDING 1

Feedback on homework is a crucial step in the learning process and without timely feedback some of the learning benefits of homework may be reduced.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That all homework policies require assessment and feedback mechanisms to be stipulated.

4.1.7 Teacher training

Homework is usually set in accordance with a school's homework policy. However, apart from these policies if available, a teacher may have very little guidance on how to set effective homework. The Committee sought information from each of the universities in Victoria seeking information on the homework elements of the pre-service teacher training courses but received limited responses on this issue. However, in hearings the Committee received evidence suggesting that a number of Victorian universities do not provide training to teachers specifically in relation to setting homework. Some universities may include a lecture on this issue, or offer an elective, however while the teacher training curriculum is reported to be large, the Committee considers this issue does not currently receive the attention it deserves. This was reflected in evidence from Associate Professor Walker:

What I would have to say is that teachers get very little advice and information about homework in teacher education courses. I might give one lecture to one group of students. The curriculum is so large, and so many things have to be covered in teacher education courses that actually teaching

¹⁴⁸ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 6.

¹⁴⁹ Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 170.

¹⁵⁰ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 122.

¹⁵¹ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 171.

*about good-quality homework, how to set homework and how to provide effective feedback is something that probably does need to change in teacher education.*¹⁵²

The focus for educational studies has been on student-oriented teaching and learning. It was agreed that homework practices still reflected social and cultural practices of the past and that a discussion of how homework could be used to reflect this new focus was due. Professor Horsley told the Committee:

*To my knowledge there is no inclusion in those sorts of courses either about this specific aspect of teachers' work, which probably has contributed to the fact that even though the school has moved and there is a change in emphases — student-oriented teaching and learning and pedagogy — homework has not caught up with that.*¹⁵³

The issue of teacher training is not one that is exclusive to Victoria or Australia. Research from the United States suggests that teachers there are not adequately trained on how to set homework before they graduate.¹⁵⁴ A 1994 report from the University of Minnesota's Centre for Applied Research and Educational Improvement noted:

*It is surprising how little attention is paid to the topic of homework in teacher education. Most teachers in the United States report that in education courses they discussed homework in relation to specific subjects, but received little training in how to devise good assignments, how to decide how much homework to give, and how to involve parents.*¹⁵⁵

This gap in teacher training courses could result from focusing on other issues deemed more important and interesting.¹⁵⁶ This means that teachers are unaware of the research in relation to homework,¹⁵⁷ and requires them to learn how to do this 'on the job'. The only guidance about homework a teacher may receive may be a school's homework policy. Early in their career teachers may assign more homework, until they learn this skill. It has been suggested that poor teachers assign the most homework, while effective teachers are able to cover the material they need to in class time.¹⁵⁸ Schools could assist teachers in this regard by requiring homework to be explicitly related to the curriculum and facilitating teachers coming together to plan lessons and assign homework.¹⁵⁹ In the United Kingdom there was a general acceptance of pre-planning of homework at the primary level. It was less well received at the secondary level. Collaboratively pre-planning homework allows new

¹⁵² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 4.

¹⁵³ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 29.

¹⁵⁴ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 38.

¹⁵⁵ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 39.

¹⁵⁶ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 42.

¹⁵⁷ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 259.

¹⁵⁸ Sara Bennett and Nancy Kalish, *The case against homework: How homework is hurting our children and what we can do* (2006) Crown Publishers, 51.

¹⁵⁹ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 19.

teachers to be supported and guided by experienced teachers.¹⁶⁰ It also helped teachers to develop interesting and relevant homework tasks. The main cost associated with this idea was in staff time and energy.¹⁶¹

*Those who made the commitment to careful pre-planning of homework – mainly in primary schools – felt that the benefits were considerable. From the teachers' point of view, when the planning was done together, it helped them to look critically at issues of continuity and progression, in homework as much as in class work.*¹⁶²

The reluctance to develop pre-planned homework in secondary schools related to the tension between covering the course content and responding to students' developmental needs and interests. They were concerned that this would produce a rigid system that would fail in its purpose of ensuring homework was integrated into learning.¹⁶³ It was felt that pre-planned homework reduced this flexibility and risked being not relevant.¹⁶⁴ The United Kingdom research was unable to ascertain the benefits of pre-planned homework at the secondary level as it was relatively uncommon.¹⁶⁵

*There was undoubtedly a marked difference between primary and secondary schools in their approach to the issue of homework planning, with primary schools generally assuming that homework would be considered as part of the curriculum planning process and most secondary schools distinguishing sharply between pre-planned classroom work programmes and flexible homework assignments.*¹⁶⁶

Students considered teachers to be a part of the homework problem. Homework was made more difficult if teachers were not clear about what was expected, did not specify when it was due and gave several assignments at once.¹⁶⁷ Several studies have found that homework is better received if students are involved in the decision making process.¹⁶⁸

FINDING 2

New teachers in Victorian schools may currently lack support to identify and set quality homework.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE

That the Department facilitate collaborative lesson and homework planning in Victorian schools, similar to that employed in the United Kingdom, to provide a support network for new teachers.

¹⁶⁰ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 29.

¹⁶¹ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 30.

¹⁶² Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 29.

¹⁶³ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 30.

¹⁶⁴ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 26.

¹⁶⁵ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 30.

¹⁶⁶ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 30.

¹⁶⁷ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 171.

¹⁶⁸ Alfie Kohn, 'Rethinking homework' (2007) 3(86) *Principal* 35, 37.

RECOMMENDATION SIX

That the Department investigate offering professional development to teachers to explain current research in homework and assist them to identify and set quality homework.

4.2 Impact of homework on students**4.2.1 Balancing competing demands**

Homework has an opportunity cost for students as it takes time away from other activities they may wish to pursue. In this context Professor Hattie suggested it may be seen as an interference or a punishment.¹⁶⁹ The Committee heard that two main demands on students' time, outside of school and homework, are travel and involvement in extracurricular activities.

Some students, especially those in remote or regional areas, may be required to travel for several hours a day to get to and from school. This is also the case for some private schools and the select entry schools in the metropolitan area. This extended travel time may limit extracurricular activities because these students cannot find time to attend, or because of the time spent commuting to and from school means they cannot make the starting time. As such students' options to socialise and get involved in extracurricular activities may be further limited. Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum at MacRobertson Girls High School advised that some students spend up to two hours a day travelling and spend time on weekends in language schools. These demands can impact on a student's ability to complete homework and extracurricular activities.

*... there are a lot of demands on their time, and that adds to the burden of homework for them and reduces the time they have to socialise and develop skills and relationships in other areas.*¹⁷⁰

It is generally agreed that involvement in extracurricular activities is beneficial for students. It not only provides a stress release, but engages them in other ways and can develop teamwork and communication skills. As such some parents may consider that their child's extracurricular activities are more important than homework.¹⁷¹ Teachers generally would acknowledge the benefits of students being involved in extracurricular activities.¹⁷² In evidence to the Committee, Karen, one of the students at MacRobertson Girls High School, a select entry school, indicated that she purposely made time to play sport, even if at times

¹⁶⁹ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

¹⁷⁰ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

¹⁷¹ Sarah McNary, Neal Glasgow and Cathy Hicks, *What successful teachers do in inclusive classrooms* (1967) Corwin press, 49.

¹⁷² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 17.

this was at the expense of completing homework.¹⁷³ The importance of extra-curricular activities was confirmed in evidence from Associate Professor Walker.

Basically I think what you have to say is that if children can develop a sense of competence in different areas of their lives — sport, drama, whatever — that is only going to be beneficial for them. The more things you are capable of doing, the better it is for you. You are going to have higher self-esteem, you are going to be more confident and you are going to be prepared to take on more challenging activities in various aspects of your life.¹⁷⁴

In his evidence Professor Hattie suggested that the current use of homework is a waste of time, however he does not advocate abolishing it.¹⁷⁵ He suggested that parents should do things with their children that has an educational benefit – this would allow parents to be more involved in their children’s lives. This does not always happen as parents allow their children to engage in what Professor Hattie terms as ‘not-productive’ activities, such as watching television or playing computer games.¹⁷⁶

For single parent families, or ones with both parents working, there is limited amount of family time, and the time that is available may be used to complete homework. Evidence from Yvonne Kelley, a parent and former teacher, suggested that after you pick a child up from after-school care or extracurricular activities you only have about 2½ hours in which to have dinner, do homework, and practice for any extracurricular activities, such as music lessons.

When they are little you pretty much get 2 ½ hours of awake time with them when you get home.¹⁷⁷

FINDING 3

Homework can reduce the amount of time available to pursue other activities and interests which may have equal or greater long term benefit.

4.2.2 Access to technology

Technology is increasingly becoming an element in both school and homework. In its written submission the VicSRC noted that many students found technology to be a benefit.¹⁷⁸ Educational computer programs can provide immediate feedback not possible using traditional methods, meaning students know immediately if they have mastered key concepts. This was confirmed in a study undertaken by Mendicino, Razzaq and Heffernan which compared the learning of two grade five maths classes. In this study one class used

¹⁷³ Karen, Year 11 student, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 40.

¹⁷⁴ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 17.

¹⁷⁵ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 11.

¹⁷⁶ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 11.

¹⁷⁷ Ms Yvonne Kelley, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 2.

¹⁷⁸ Victorian Student Representative Council, *Submission 23*, 6.

traditional pen and paper homework while the other used computers which provided the students with immediate feedback. They concluded that students performed better using computer based homework.

*In this study, students learned significantly more with Web-based homework than with paper-and-pencil homework ...*¹⁷⁹

The Committee heard how access to technology can impact on the ability to complete homework. In its written submission Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service suggested that in 2010-11, 5 per cent of households with children did not have a home computer and 7 per cent of families with children under 15 did not have the internet.¹⁸⁰ It suggested that the number of children impacted by these figures was greater than these figures suggest because many families have multiple children. Households that do not have this resource mean these students will not be able to complete homework if this is required.

Ron from the VicSRC noted that there was a period of time when he did not have access to the internet at home. When he was given assignments he had to use the internet at school instead of socialising with his friends.¹⁸¹ Accessing school computer facilities may not be possible for all students due to a range of factors such as demand for these resources and needing to leave school on time to catch public transport. A lack of technology in the home can hamper the ability of students to complete their homework and also participate in class discussion the following day. Tess from the Victorian Student Representative Council reflected on a personal experience, where lack of access caused a student to feel excluded and isolated:

*... there was a student in my class who did not have internet at home. Everyone was asked to watch a broadcast or research something to bring back to the next class, and that student felt kind of excluded and as if they were not able to take part in that section of what we were learning because of a barrier as simple as technology and internet at home.*¹⁸²

Professor Hattie noted that there are a number of online resources that can assist a student's learning such as videos and interactive online tutorials.¹⁸³ However, he disputed the current impact of computers on education, suggesting that has not been a significant change in the way lessons are taught and homework is set.

*The effect size of computers is very small. Why? Because most teachers do not teach in the way that requires the use of computers and technology.*¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Michael Mendicino, Leena Razzaq and Neil Heffernan, 'A comparison of traditional homework to computer-supported homework' (2009) 3(41) *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 331, 342.

¹⁸⁰ Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, *Submission 5*, 1.

¹⁸¹ Ron, student, Victorian Student Representative Council, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

¹⁸² Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 9.

¹⁸³ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

¹⁸⁴ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

Research suggests web-based homework will progressively increase across all year levels as the digital divide is narrowed, there was access to free or low-cost programs, and teachers become more comfortable with this style of learning.¹⁸⁵

When technology is applied correctly it can assist with learning and the completion of homework. However, for some students the increased access to and use of computers may act to distract them from completing their homework. The Committee received anecdotal evidence from a number of witnesses relating to how computers can distract students from completing their homework. Professor Horsley advised that at the homework clubs he ran in New South Wales for the expat-Tongan community access to computers was supervised to ensure the students did not get distracted.

*... you have to have a whole series of protocols or the kids will just get onto Polyfest and look at pictures of the try someone scored in Tonga versus Samoa and all of this.*¹⁸⁶

This view was supported by Michael Barr, who advised that in his experience computers in the classroom were a distraction as they would be used for gaming, social media and other purposes.

*The kids would waste time on them, they would access pornography and they would not do their work.*¹⁸⁷

In its written submission Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network (MMLLEN) provided an example of students getting distracted by computers and staying up late on social media rather than completing the assigned homework:

*One teacher cited figures quoted by two of her students of staying up to 1am regularly and spending 70-80 hours a week on social media in some form.*¹⁸⁸

Given homework is usually conducted in an unsupervised setting, computers could be a greater distraction at home. The Committee notes that in order to address these issues some homework clubs only allow the use of computers in a highly supervised manner.¹⁸⁹ Issues relating to homework clubs will be explored further in Chapter Six.

4.3 Future trends: Flipped Learning

Flipped learning offers an alternative homework model to that currently used. In this model lectures or other means of direct instruction are not eliminated, rather they are moved out of the classroom. This means that the work that is traditionally done in class is now

¹⁸⁵ Michael Mendicino, Leena Razzaq and Neil Heffernan, 'A comparison of traditional homework to computer-supported homework' (2009) 3(41) *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 331, 331.

¹⁸⁶ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 20.

¹⁸⁷ Mr Michael Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 50.

¹⁸⁸ Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, *Submission 24*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 20.

completed at home, and the work that is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class.¹⁹⁰ The appeal and adoption of this model has increased as technology has advanced. In essence it is not a new idea, but it was suggested to the Committee:

It is an old idea that has been reinvented, and I suppose it has been reinvented because of YouTube. You can have a YouTube video that explains how to solve a mathematics problem, which might take 5 minutes, and you watch the video and then the class is based around the fact that you watched the video, whereas in an earlier era the class might have been based around the fact that you had read something from the textbook.¹⁹¹



“Flipped Learning” enables students to prepare for lessons by viewing material in a number of different forms prior to class.

Flipped learning requires students to undertake preparatory reading or watch video lectures at home. This allows students to take responsibility for the pace of their learning as they can do this at a time of their choice. This method also enables students to review concepts at their own pace, rather than at the teacher’s pace, ensuring comprehension. Class time is used to apply and test this knowledge in a supervised setting.

The Committee received evidence that this model is increasingly being applied in Victorian schools. Evidence suggested that this method of learning has a faster uptake in maths and sciences than in humanities. This is due to the fact that maths and sciences are able to replace lectures in class with videos at home. Humanities on the other hand still require the reading of a novel or treatise for discussion in the classroom.¹⁹² Essentially humanities subjects have been employing this method for some time, but without the use of videos.

A further advantage of this model arises in the classroom. Bergman and Sams undertook a comparison of time spent on activities in traditional and flipped classrooms. (See Table 4.1) They found that as teachers in flipped classes did not need to explain key concepts at the start of the lesson, they had more time to spend with students to assist with their individual learning.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, *Flip your classroom* (2012) International Society for Technology in Education, 13.

¹⁹¹ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 21.

¹⁹² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 21.

¹⁹³ Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, *Flip your classroom* (2012) International Society for Technology in Education, 14.

Figure 6: Comparison of Class Time in Traditional versus Flipped Classrooms

Traditional Classroom		Flipped Classroom	
Activity	Time	Activity	Time
Warm-up activity	5 min.	Warm-up activity	5 min.
Go over previous night's homework	20 min.	Go over previous night's homework	10 min.
Lecture new content	30-45 min.	Guided and independent practice and/or lab activity	75 min.
Guided and independent practice and/or lab activity	20-35 min.		

Source: Bergmann and Sans Flip your classroom, p15

Advantages with this model include students engaging with material in class rather than being lectured to, students can vocalise any points they do not understand, and it encourages group dynamics. It also allows teachers to spend more time with the students who need it most.¹⁹⁴ Students are able to watch the videos at home with their parents, which means they can see what their children are learning and are better able to support and assist them with their homework.¹⁹⁵

Some disadvantages include that students cannot ask immediate questions that come to their mind, as they could if the topic were being taught live.¹⁹⁶ Given that students access preparatory materials electronically, another common concern is that it could contribute to an even greater 'digital divide'. While in one trial in the US there were no students who claimed that they did not have access to either a personal or public computer, a portable device, or a DVD player,¹⁹⁷ this is not always likely to be the case. Finally, some students may not perform well in group work (for example because of shyness).

Krista Seddon from the Victorian Student Representative Council advised the Committee that a lot of students are interested in flipped learning.

*A lot of students were saying, 'If you did have access to those key teachings, then you could watch them at home', and that was the homework, I suppose, that kind of learning.*¹⁹⁸

The Department advised that a number of Victorian schools were applying this model.

*Already we have schools that provide access to online versions of classroom teaching. Teachers use flipped learning in different ways in their classrooms. It is something that is being used across the system in lots of different ways, and we also have examples of that in some of our virtual learning networks as well.*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Victorian Space Science Education Centre, *Flipped classroom*, <<http://www.vssec.vic.edu.au/resources/professional-learning/flipped-classroom/>> viewed 1 July 2014.

¹⁹⁵ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

¹⁹⁶ Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, *Flip your classroom* (2012) International Society for Technology in Education, 13.

¹⁹⁷ Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, *Flip your classroom* (2012) International Society for Technology in Education, 97.

¹⁹⁸ Ms Krista Seddon, Coordinator, Victorian Student Representative Council, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

¹⁹⁹ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 10.

Although there are advantages for some students from the flipped learning approach, the Committee received evidence questioning the extent to which this model could be applied. It was noted by Professor Horsley that this method of learning would not be suitable for all students or all subjects.

... for certain circumstances those sort of things will be useful — without a teacher presentation you can watch a video over and over again — but that will not apply to the mainstream of students. Some things can be very useful because you can watch them over and over again, but given my example, it is highly unlikely that the flip classroom will lead you forward in quadratic equations.²⁰⁰

FINDING 4

Flipped learning offers a new way of engaging children in education and may allow for a better use of time in the classroom.

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN

That the Department investigate ways to support a new homework feedback paradigm including the development of flipped learning models and the sharing of online resources between schools.

4.4 Applying Flipped Learning in Victorian Schools

4.4.1 BENDIGO SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL

BSSC is investigating the application of this model. Some teachers have taken study tours to the United States to learn how this model is being used, and how to use technology to engage with students. The College advised that it is undertaking work to ensure its learning management system can support digital learning. Teachers are also identifying topics which lend themselves to this style of learning.²⁰¹ Once rolled out, the College hopes that it will assist students to engage and better understand the material.

What we hope to do with the flipped approach is to work with the students to say, 'You go away and just explore that as content. Listen to the podcasts or listen to the animated PowerPoint, or whatever it might be'. Then we will come back, unpack it further and do the hard stuff in class and in the conversations.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 21.

²⁰¹ Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 8.

²⁰² Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 8.

4.4.2 MERCY COLLEGE, COBURG

Mercy College has experimented with versions of the Flipped Learning model for some time. This began with audio recording lessons for students who are away from class for extended periods, such as through illness.

It was only audio, but she had all the handouts; she could listen to it and follow through. She was then more or less doing the class by herself. It was a bit like distance ed in that situation.²⁰³

More recently the College has used videos in a combined year 11 and 12 textile design class. The teacher was able to prepare the videos in advance and divide her time between the students as required. The students generally found the experience to be a positive one, but recognised a drawback was they could not immediately ask questions as they could in a traditional classroom if they did not understand something in the video.

The feedback was: 'It was great. I could watch it again to make sure I understood it, but when I wanted to ask a question, I could not ask the question of the video; I had to record that in some way'.²⁰⁴

4.4.3 MELBOURNE HIGH SCHOOL

Melbourne High School has also employed this model. As a select entry school, students often are required to travel for over an hour to get to school. The advantage of flipped learning for these students is that they are able to watch the videos during their commute. As students are familiar with the material before they attend the class, teachers report that they have been able to explore areas more deeply than they could had the traditional homework model been employed.

Our experience, therefore, suggests that educational technology is beginning to radically reshape the old boundaries between classroom and home study in ways that no doubt would be very important to the consideration of this inquiry.²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

²⁰⁴ Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

²⁰⁵ Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 4.

CHAPTER 5: FACTORS AFFECTING HOMEWORK PERFORMANCE

The average correlation between time spent on homework and achievement was substantial for secondary school students, but for elementary school students had hovered around no relationship at all

Professor Harris Cooper

There are a number of factors that can mitigate homework's effectiveness as a learning tool including the age and stage of the students, the ability of the student, the subject matter, the resources available to the student and the quality of the homework set.

Most perceptions and beliefs around homework, positive and negative, are not based on empirical evidence, but on sets of assumptions, anecdotal evidence and intuitive logic. The idea that more work will lead to better results or, conversely, homework will eat up students' free time and time to develop other interests are both logical conclusions.

Those who consider homework to be a valuable learning tool see benefits such as the retention of knowledge and skill through practice; the establishment of strong study habits; development of hopefully life-long self-directed learning; and an engagement with their education and development. They also see it as another way of parents and students communicating and engaging with each other.

Those who are opposed to homework, or who consider that homework should be limited, generally consider it provides insufficient benefits given its unproved effectiveness and the costs to students in time, energy, stress and the loss of opportunity to pursue other interests.

Until a causal relationship between homework and academic achievement and personal development is established in studies in Australia, based on Australian educational and cultural structures, this argument is likely to remain unresolved and will continue to be one of perception.

5.1 The effect of age and stage

Proponents of homework such as Harris Cooper acknowledge that positive effects of homework on academic achievement for young students may be limited. In a research paper, Cooper stated that:

*The average correlation between time spent on homework and achievement was substantial for secondary school students, but for elementary school students had hovered around no relationship at all.*²⁰⁶

His suggested that this may be because younger children have less capacity to tune out distractions, which are likely to be more prevalent at home than at school, and that they have not yet developed the necessary study habits. Indeed, he suggests that teachers in early grades may assign homework with the primary purpose of developing the study skills required later in a child's schooling. For this reason it is perhaps not surprising that the results do not show up in test results. It is very difficult to measure what effect the hoped for improvement in study habits and skills will have on these younger children until later.

Specifically, in his major meta-analysis published in 1989, Cooper found a dramatic influence of grade level on homework's effectiveness.

In his findings, he suggested that if the teacher was teaching high school students, the average student in the class that had homework would outperform 69 per cent of the students in the class that had no homework. In other words, the student who ranked 13th in the achievement in the class with homework would rank eighth if he or she were shifted into the no homework class.²⁰⁷

At the elementary or primary school level, using the same experiment of establishing one class with homework and one without homework, homework would not help the students pass any schoolmates – in other words, it made no difference.²⁰⁸

In summary, the results of Cooper's 1989 meta-analysis showed that:

- 43 correlations indicated the students who did more homework had better achievement scores while only 7 indicated the opposite.
- The students in grade 3 through five, the correlation between the amount of homework and achievement was nearly 0.
- The students in grades five through nine was +.07.
- And for high school students it was +.25.²⁰⁹

From this, Cooper has suggested that homework has substantial positive effects on the achievement of high school students. He has suggested there is benefit, albeit a smaller one, for junior high school students. For elementary school students, or primary school students

²⁰⁶ National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, *Homework: What the research says* (2008), 2. Available at <http://www.nctm.org/uploadedFiles/Research_News_and_Advocacy/Research/Clips_and_Briefs/Brief%20-%20Homework%20What%20Research%20Says.pdf> viewed 16 June 2014.

²⁰⁷ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 88.

²⁰⁸ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 88.

²⁰⁹ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 88.

in the Australian context, the effect of homework on achievement is trivial at best and in fact may be zero.²¹⁰

During the inquiry, the value of homework in the early years of schooling was a consistent theme. There is little empirical evidence that homework has any discernible effect on primary student academic results. However, as discussed earlier homework may play an important transitional role in preparing students for secondary school and beyond.

FINDING 5

There is strong evidence and general agreement that homework at the primary school level has little impact on academic performance, but may play an important transitional role in preparing students for secondary school and beyond.

5.2 The effect of different subject matter

A further question in relation to the effectiveness of homework as a learning tool relates to the different subjects and whether homework improves academic performance equally in, for example mathematics and science, as it does in English and History. Again, evidence tends to be somewhat mixed. It also depends on how success is being measured. While class or unit test results may provide a relatively simple measure, such as preparatory study for a maths test through learning of formulae and particular problem-solving skills, the improvement through general reading may be harder to gauge.

According to some researchers, it is found that maths homework consistently gives statistically meaningful and a large positive effect on test scores. However, additional homework in science, English and History are shown to have little to no of impact on test scores.²¹¹

This view was also put to the Committee by Professor Hattie in a public hearing, when he said:

*Does it make a difference across subjects? Yes, it kind of does. Homework has more influence in maths, partly because that is where more often than not kids are given opportunities to reinforce at home something that has been learnt.*²¹²

He went on to suggest the reason for this is that in maths much of the homework tends to be deliberate practice of things covered in class. It was Professor Hattie's contention that in

²¹⁰ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 88.

²¹¹ Ozkan Eren and Daniel J Henderson, 'Are we wasting our children's time by giving them more homework?' (2011) 5(30) *Economics of Education Review* 950, 951.

²¹² Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

science and the social sciences the homework tends to consist more of projects, which he considers has 'a zero to negative effect' on learning outcomes.²¹³

Students who gave evidence to the Committee also considered that homework tended to be more useful in mathematics. Susan, who was one of four students from the select entry schools who appeared at a public hearing, suggested the value of the homework was subject specific and suggested that the only way a student can improve in maths is by practising.²¹⁴

5.3 Measuring homework and the optimal amount

It is one of the criticisms of homework policies that they often measure it by the time it takes. There are a number of problems with measuring homework by hours. Firstly, it is an input measure that tells us very little about what is produced, how well it is done or what the results are. Secondly, it may be that students who are struggling will take significantly longer to do the work than those who are achieving well, which may add to the equity gap.

It has been a feature of some of the research that particular timeframes have been suggested as a 'rule of thumb', acknowledging that there may well be variables unique to the students or the circumstances they find themselves in. In general terms, Cooper suggested that 'an optimal amount of homework for high school students of between 90 minutes and 2 ½ hours a night.'²¹⁵ This timeframe built on previous work he did in which he suggested that homework should have different purposes for different grades. He suggested that the frequency of mandatory homework assignments should be:

- Grades 1 to 3 – 1 to 3 assignments a week, each lasting no more than 15 minutes
- Grades 4 to 6 – 2 to 4 assignments a week, each lasting 15 to 45 minutes
- Grades 7 to 9 – 3 to 5 assignments a week, each lasting 45 to 75 minutes
- Grades 10 to 12 – 4 to 5 assignments a week each lasting 75 to 120 minutes²¹⁶

A scan of Australian State Government guidelines on the optimum amount of homework that should be done identified some different approaches. The Victorian Department of Education and Early Development in 2012 stipulates the following indicative hours:

- Early years (Prep to Year 4) not more than 30 minutes per day and no homework on weekends or vacations;
- Middle years (years 5 to 9) 30 to 45 minutes per day in year 5 and 45 to 90 minutes per day in Year 9; and

²¹³ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 10.

²¹⁴ Susan, Year 11 student, Mac. Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 12.

²¹⁵ Harris Cooper, Civey Robinson and Erika A. Patall, 'Does homework improve academic achievement? A synthesis of research, 1987–2003' (2006) 1(76) *Review of Educational Research* 1, 2.

²¹⁶ Harris Cooper, 'Synthesis of research on homework: Grade level has a dramatic influence on homework's effectiveness' (1989) 1(47) *Educational Leadership* 85, 91.

- For later years (years 10 to 12) from one to 3 hours per night a week and up to 6 hours on weekends during peak VCE periods.²¹⁷

The Queensland Department of Education, Training and the Arts in 2012 suggested the following times:

- Prep year – generally students are not set homework at all;
- Years 1 to 3 could be up to but generally not more than one hour per week;
- Years 4 and 5 could be up to the generally not more than 2 to 3 hours per week;
- Years 6 and 7 could be up to but generally not more than 3 to 4 hours per week;
- Years 8 and 9 could be up to the generally not more than five hours each week; and
- For years 10, 11 and 12 times vary according to the learning needs of individual programmes of learning.²¹⁸

The Education Departments in NSW, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT, have policies regarding homework but do not recommend particular hours.

It is important to note, as pointed out by Horsley and Walker that in the correlational research the causal relationship between time spent and results is not clear. Does more homework lead to better students, or do better students get assigned more homework? They suggested that:

*.. when the correlation between time spent on homework and achievement is positive it is not clear whether this means that more time on homework improves achievement outcomes or whether teachers assign more homework to more capable, high achieving students.*²¹⁹

Professor Hattie told the Committee that:

*The problem is that time is the easiest variable. I would be trying to convince parents that it does not matter whether it is 5 minutes or 5 hours, let us make it a time. I do not really care whether it is 30 minutes or an hour. It is what you do in that time that really matters.*²²⁰

The fact that homework policies, and much of the literature on homework, talk about it in terms of hours, and that studies such as the Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) measure hours of homework as against a qualitative measure that might provide a more fine-grained assessment of its value, supports the view that it is measured like this because it is the easiest way to quantify something that is notoriously difficult to measure.

²¹⁷ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012), 7. Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

²¹⁸ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012), 7. Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

²¹⁹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 25.

²²⁰ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 12.

Using time as a measure of how much homework to set is imprecise. It will take two students a different amount of time to complete the same task.²²¹ This time measure does not take into account the different abilities of each student in the class. In evidence to the Committee, Associate Professor Richard Walker suggested that the amount of time allocated to homework tasks mandated in these policies was not based on any research.

*There is absolutely no research advice on how much time students should spend on homework. We have got no guidance from research at all on the amount of time that students should spend on homework. That is a decision that has to be made by the school community.*²²²

As suggested earlier, research indicates that doing hours of homework each night is not in the best interest of children,²²³ particularly if no substantive difference in grades between students who completed homework and those who did not can be shown.²²⁴

Students, too, see prescribed nightly hours as problematic, because it has the potential to restrict other activities that may be beneficial without necessarily having significant educational value. In her evidence before the Committee, Susan said:

*I actually think setting a maximum number of hours per night is probably the wrong thing to do. I think expecting something done that night is what is wrong. If you have got training that night, you are not going to have time to do any homework, even if it is just 1 hour. I think the expectation to have something done by the next lesson or by the next day is what is wrong, not so much the amount of homework that is set.*²²⁵

The limitations of an hourly measure notwithstanding, at the moment time is the most common way of measuring homework.

FINDING 6

Measuring homework by the time spent doing it is an imprecise and inadequate measure that does not take into account the quality of the work or the ability of the student or, increasingly importantly, student access to technology.

5.4 Parents and homework

Another benefit of homework that has been raised during the Inquiry has been the role it plays in enabling parents to engage with their child's learning. It has been contended that parents are increasingly disenfranchised in their children's schooling and it is only through seeing and participating in homework that they are able to get a clear picture of what their

²²¹ Buffy Sallee and Neil Rigler, 'Doing our homework on homework: How does homework help?' (2008) 2(98) *The English Journal* 46, 48.

²²² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 15.

²²³ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 17.

²²⁴ Valerie Strauss, 'Homework: An unnecessary evil? ... Surprising findings from new research', *The Washington Post*, 26 November 2012. Available at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2012/11/26/homework-an-unnecessary-evil-surprising-findings-from-new-research/>> viewed 1 July 2014.

²²⁵ Susan, Year 11 student, Mac. Robertson Girls' High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 12.

children are learning and how well they are doing. While this is a common theme in both the literature and in the submissions to the Inquiry, like most elements of the issue of homework, there is a wide range of views.

It is generally accepted that parents of younger children are more likely to be involved in their children's homework because the children have yet to develop personal study skills, time management and general autonomy.²²⁶

Proponents of parental engagement with homework point to a number of roles that parents should play, from the extreme involvements where parents 'often sit behind their children during homework, ensuring they complete the assigned tasks',²²⁷ to ensuring that students have the appropriate space and time to do the assigned work.

According to the Victorian Principal's Association, homework 'fosters and builds links and relationships between home and school' and can enhance the relationship between the child and parent by providing an opportunity for parents to support their child's learning.²²⁸



In Primary School, children are likely to need more help from parents with their homework than in later years.

This view was also supported by the Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body (VCSPB), which suggested that homework is a:

*... good opportunity for parents to ascertain what learning entails, where their children are with respect to their learning overall and to identify any areas that need to be discussed with teaching staff.*²²⁹

The VCSPB stressed in its submission that the 'children learn everywhere and 'learning at home' (homework) is a crucial overlap between school and home that supports learning and developing effective partnerships between parents and teachers'. The submission suggested that:

*Where parents are engaged in their child's learning there is a positive impact on the academic outcomes for the child, but also on the child's (and the parent's) attitude to learning.*²³⁰

²²⁶ Department of Education and Communities (New South Wales), *Homework Policy: Research Scan* (2012), 11. Available at <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/policies/curriculum/schools/homework/Hwk_Res%20scan.pdf> viewed 9 July 2014.

²²⁷ Michael Romano, 'Defining Your Homework Stance (Part 1)' (2013) 9(79) *The Science Teacher* 11, 1.

²²⁸ Victorian Principals Association, *Submission 14*.

²²⁹ Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 20*, 1.

Horsley and Walker have suggested that parental involvement in children's education may lead to parents providing a conducive educational environment for their children and may help parents to be 'better able to gauge their capabilities and provide targeted support and feedback.'²³¹

There are a number of ways that parents can usefully be involved in children's homework. These include:

- Establish physical and psychological structures for the child homework performance;
- Interact with the school or teacher about homework;
- Provide general oversight of the homework process;
- Respond to the students' homework performance;
- Engage in homework processes and tasks with the child;
- Engage in strategies designed to create a fit between tasks demands and the child's skill levels;
- Engage in interactive processes supporting the child's understanding of homework; and
- Engage in strategies designed to help the child learn processes conducive to achievement.²³²

It has been suggested that if parents become involved in their child's homework in appropriate ways such as being 'a sounding board to help students summarize what they learned from the homework' without having to act as teachers or to police students' homework completion, then it is likely to enhance learning.²³³ Such a role is likely to have a



Helping children with homework can help parents engage with their child's learning.

positive effect on the child-parent relationship as it will be seen by the student as collegiate rather than authoritarian.

Along the same lines, such engagement may lead to students and their parents or other family members to become engaged in conversations that relate to the academic curriculum and thus extend the students' learning.²³⁴

²³⁰ Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body, *Submission 20*, 1.

²³¹ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 44.

²³² Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 45.

²³³ Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering, 'The case for and against homework' (2007) 6(64) *Educational Leadership* 74, 6.

²³⁴ Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering, 'The case for and against homework' (2007) 6(64) *Educational Leadership* 74, 6.

The view that homework has an important role in connecting the parent with the school was supported by Mr Don Jewell, a retired primary school teacher, who suggested that this communication is the most important role of homework. In his submission to the inquiry, he said that:

*If a parent sees something of what the student is reading or writing almost every day, they are in a position to understand the progress the child is making (or perhaps difficulties they were having) – and parent-teacher interviews are consequently more meaningful.*²³⁵

FINDING 7

Homework can have the effect of helping a parent to understand the progress the child is making or otherwise and can therefore help make parent-teacher interviews more meaningful.

Homework can have the effect of helping a parent to understand the progress the child is making or otherwise and can therefore help make parent-teacher interviews more meaningful. While such engagement is important, there is also the potential for parents to take on too central a role in their children's homework, thus undermining the benefits of developing independence and the skills necessary to study alone.

This was an issue raised in both the literature and in some submissions to the inquiry. In a Harris Cooper study in 2000, two thirds of parents reported inappropriate homework involvement, including giving students the correct answer. Cooper has also suggested in an earlier paper 'the formal role of parents in homework should be kept to a minimum because they differ in interest, knowledge, teaching skills and time availability.'²³⁶

Notwithstanding the potential for parents to undermine any value of homework, there is a widely held view that parents have an important role to play. In its submission to the inquiry, the Victorian Association Catholic Primary School Principals, parents were seen as a vital element to a child's education, including homework.

VACPSP members encourage parents to assist their child with his/her work at home in a number of ways:

- Asking whether homework has been set and ensuring their child keeps a homework diary;
- Acknowledging their child's success and asking how his/her homework and class work are progressing;
- Helping their child to plan and organise a time and space for completing work at home;

²³⁵ Mr Don Jewel, *Submission 2*, 1.

²³⁶ Harris Cooper, *Homework research and policy: A Review of literature* (2000). Available at <http://www.hisparks.com/MathHelpers/Homework_Research_and_Policy.pdf> viewed 1 July 2014.

- Assisting their child to complete work at home by discussing key questions and directing him/her to resources; and
- Discussing homework in their child's first language (where English is not the main language spoken at home) and linking it to his/her previous experience.²³⁷

The role parents play in assisting their children with homework is seen as particularly important in primary school years. The Office for Standards in Education in the UK, in its report, *Homework: Learning From Practice*, suggested that for the majority of primary schools' homework programs, the contribution of parents is enormous and essential.²³⁸

While some proponents of homework suggest that one of its benefits is that it involves parents in their children's schooling, not all see it as beneficial. Some studies have reported minimal positive effects or even negative effects for parental involvement. Reasons for this include over-involvement by parents, which can undermine some of the perceived benefits of the homework; tensions that can arise as parents and children clash over the completion or non-completion of homework; and some parents feel unprepared to help their children with homework.²³⁹

In *Reforming Homework*, Horsley and Walker suggest that schools that encourage parental participation, and that assist parents in providing support to their children, tend to have better educational outcomes.²⁴⁰ While this relates to education as a whole, it follows that it also applies to individual elements of that education such as homework.

One of the key benefits of homework is to engage and inform parents of their children's educational progress. It is argued that it provides a conduit for information that otherwise parents wouldn't have. By understanding what their children are doing, parents will be better able to provide appropriate support. The Committee was told by Ms Trish Jelbart of the Mathematical Association of Victoria that:

*Homework provides a fantastic opportunity for a direct communication about the actual work that students are doing in the classroom to the parents so the parents can really interact with the actual learning that is going on.*²⁴¹

This engagement is important not for homework specifically but for the education process generally. Associate Professor Walker told the Committee that:

*...if parents are involved in their kid's schooling in some way or another, then that is very beneficial. It is the parental aspirations and expectations that are most important. This is not relating to homework; this is just parental involvement in general.*²⁴²

²³⁷ Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals, *Submission 32*.

²³⁸ Penelope Weston, *Homework: Learning from practice* (1999) The Stationery Office, 13.

²³⁹ Robert J. Marzano and Debra J. Pickering, 'The case for and against homework' (2007) 6(64) *Educational Leadership* 74.

²⁴⁰ Mike Horsley and Richard Walker, *Reforming homework: practices, learning and policy* (2013) Palgrave Macmillan, 201.

²⁴¹ Ms Trish Jelbart, Councillor, The Mathematics Association of Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

²⁴² Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 11.

Schools who provided submissions and gave evidence in public hearings share this view, seeing education as a collaborative process between the student, parent and the school, and considering parents ‘partners’²⁴³.

FINDING 8

Successful schools see education as a collaborative process between the student, parent and the school, and consider parents to be ‘partners’ in their children’s education. Schools that assist parents in providing support to their children tend to have better educational outcomes.

5.4.1 Parent engagement in child’s learning

One of the recurring themes in the Inquiry in relation to parental involvement in homework has been the need for parents to support their children without undermining the autonomy that is an important part of the learning process. By providing support in the form of a quiet study space, time to do the work and a generally conducive and supportive environment, parents give their children the best chance to successfully complete homework and enhance their learning by doing so. Providing this ‘scaffolding’ as it is referred to in the education literature, is perhaps the key role for parents, particularly for older students. This point was emphasised by Associate Professor Walker who told the Committee:

...when parents provide support and assistance — scaffolding — for their children, that helps the children develop self-directed learning skills. If parents help the child find a place to work, manage their time, set priorities, set goals and manage their emotions too ... this will help them develop self-directed learning skills.²⁴⁴

One of the key elements of appropriate parental involvement in homework, particularly with older students, is that their engagement does not undermine the autonomy of students. The self-directed nature of homework is cited as one of its most important elements because it will develop autonomy, initiative and self-efficacy and confidence. As discussed earlier, the sense of self-efficacy and capacity that comes from completing an assignment is a vital part of successful education outcomes.

The corollary of this is that parents become too involved, too prescriptive and even actively do the homework themselves.

One example of how parents can undermine the educational value of homework is to become too focussed on micro-managing the homework process. Professor Hattie told the Committee that parents adopting what he referred to as a ‘surveillance role’ can have a negative effect, particularly for students who are struggling. He said in a public hearing:

²⁴³ Dr Michelle Cotter, Principal Mercy College Coburg, Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 6.

²⁴⁴ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 12.

*...if parents in any way invoke surveillance — and I use that word quite strongly — that is, you must go into your room, turn off the TV and sit there for 30 minutes, our latest study showed what an incredibly negative effect that has.*²⁴⁵

This negative effect was also reflected in evidence given by a student, Tess, who told the Committee that over-zealous involvement by parents, particularly in ‘nagging’ about homework may diminish any enthusiasm the student may have about doing it. She said in a public hearing that:

*I guess when you talk about the constant nagging to get homework done that can sometimes put out the fire of any real desire to get it done...When the parents are there constantly asking to help or telling you to do it, it can sometimes flatten any enthusiasm towards the task given.*²⁴⁶

It needs to be recognised in discussing the engagement of parents in their children’s education that there are quite different expectations and outcomes in primary school than in secondary school. It is expected and is considered important that at primary school parents will be more actively involved in assisting with homework. Younger children have less developed study skills, often cannot manage their time or work to deadlines and need the direct assistance of their parents. The Mathematics Association of Victoria told the Committee that in the early years of schooling, parents should be actively engaged if they can.²⁴⁷

5.4.2 Issues of parental control

Secondary students often have the skills to do the work and have more content knowledge than most parents. For them, the loss of autonomy that can come from parents’ over-involvement may diminish the value they get from homework. Associate Professor Walker told the Committee that:

*If teachers are too controlling and if parents are too controlling, that has a negative effect on student learning in general but also on homework outcomes.*²⁴⁸

Parental support is seen as an important element of a successful approach to homework if the focus is on development of the student’s personal understanding and capacity rather than as part of the competitive environment of school and a results focus. The chief benefits of homework identified through the inquiry revolve around development of specific skills through practice, retention of knowledge through revision, the development of general research and study skills, along with the development of time management and organisational skills and self-discipline. Homework may not itself attract a grade or mark, even if feedback is a necessary part of the process. It is largely a tool to develop the capacity of students.

²⁴⁵ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

²⁴⁶ Tess, student, Templestowe College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

²⁴⁷ Mr Simon Pryor, Executive Officer, The Mathematics Association of Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 2.

²⁴⁸ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of ‘Reforming Homework’, University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 9.

FINDING 9

Homework's value is largely as a tool to develop the capacity of students, even when it has no mark or grade attached.

This focus means that it may be counterproductive to see homework as a competitive activity, rather than one that is highly individual to the student. Associate Professor Walker told the Committee that an individual focus can make parental support very valuable. He suggested that:

If parents provide some degree of autonomy for their children when they are doing their homework, that is definitely beneficial if parents focus on student improvement, rather than comparisons with other students in the class, and if they focus on the child's development of understanding, once again rather than how well other students are doing, or even on outcomes.²⁴⁹

He suggested that if parents are controlling and if they focus on the competitive rather than the personal improvement of their child, they are likely to have a detrimental rather than a positive effect.²⁵⁰

If there is a focus on comparison with other students — and once again this is really competition — and if parents are controlling in the way that they interact with their children in relation to homework, that is also detrimental.²⁵¹

There will always be a balancing act for parents who are committed to their children's success between enabling their children to take responsibility for the homework they need to do, and "nagging" them to do it. As suggested earlier, the Committee has heard from some students and some parents that the 'nagging' can be counter-productive and can lead to some de-motivation of students. The development of personal autonomy, particularly for adolescents, is an essential stage and the micro-management of their homework has the potential to undermine that autonomy.

The difficulty for parents, however, is that they are likely to know whether their children have the necessary time management, motivation and discipline to attend to their homework commitments. If a parent feels that their children need to be 'nagged' to do the work, then the question arises whether they would be letting their children down by not doing it, even if the child resents it.

This dilemma was highlighted by Ms Yvonne Kelley in a public hearing as well as in her submission. Ms Kelley told the Committee about the tensions that were caused by her having to 'ride her' daughter to do her homework:

²⁴⁹ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 11.

²⁵⁰ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 11.

²⁵¹ Associate Professor Richard Walker, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', University of Sydney, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 11.

*As she went through her secondary schooling and became a little more disinterested in schooling and more interested in extracurricular stuff, it became 'What do I do? Do I ride her and make sure she does that piece of work?' and we spend 2½ hours a night with her having a tantrum.*²⁵²

There are no 'policy settings' that can resolve this dilemma for parents as the appropriate way to manage the issue of parental control over homework is, and will always be, specific to the family and individuals concerned.

What is clear from the evidence presented during the inquiry that autonomy and self-direction are important elements in making homework an effective learning tool. It is also clear that some parents play a significant role in 'driving' the amount of homework a student will do. In fact, evidence from the select entry schools suggested that the schools found themselves in the position on occasions of having to try to limit the amount of homework being done.

*...it is necessary for us to be explicit with parents about limiting the number of hours that students spend on homework and study, because their parents are highly involved in promoting them to be successful in their educational endeavours and at times can put an overemphasis on the amount of work that they need to do at home.*²⁵³

5.4.3 Inability to assist students

Another issue facing parents in assisting their children with homework is their personal capacity to do so, either through lack of content knowledge, their own educational history or language or other barriers. As students advance through secondary school and begin to deal with more complex content and concepts, many parents begin to find it difficult to assist. This is a problem not just for homework, but in students' education generally. One witness, Ms Saitlik from Victorian Principals Association, told the Committee that it is hard for some schools to get parents to go on school councils because these parents 'do not believe that they have got the abilities to contribute'.²⁵⁴

With homework, the content knowledge and the changes to the way things are taught leave many parents unable to assist their children, particularly in the later years of secondary school. Ms Fettling, of BSSC, told the Committee in a public hearing that:

*The parents ... often say, 'By the time they get to years 11 and 12 we are not familiar with the content and we do not always know how to help them.'*²⁵⁵

She suggested that 'the rigour of the curriculum' is beyond the parents' understanding and that even if they want to assist their children, they don't know how.²⁵⁶

²⁵² Ms Yvonne Kelley, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 5.

²⁵³ Ms Sue Harrap, Assistant Principal, Nossal High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

²⁵⁴ Ms Sharon Saitlik, VPA Board Member, Victorian Principals Association, and Principal, Mont Albert Primary School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 11.

²⁵⁵ Ms Meredith Fettling, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

²⁵⁶ Ms Meredith Fettling, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

Professor Hattie suggested that even when parents can assist their children with homework, this can cause broader problems by increasing the equity gap.²⁵⁷ Professor Hattie made the point that while the desire to assist their children was universal, the capacity to do so was not:

*I have not met a parent yet in my career who is from a low socioeconomic status that does not want to help their kids; they just do not know how.*²⁵⁸

It is not only educational and socio-economic background that can have an effect on parents' capacity to assist their children. The fact that many families have two working parents and that work and other commitments make it harder for parents to be available to help their children with homework was also raised in public hearings. In their submission to the inquiry, Yvonne Kelley and Michael Barr, who are both parents and former teachers said:

*We note that many parents now work full-time, and a high proportion of students do not complete their school day until they are picked up from after care at 6.00pm. Homework on top of this adds pressure to already busy family lives.*²⁵⁹

5.5 Private Tutoring

While not falling within the definition of homework, and not being part of the terms of reference, private tutoring warrants some discussion. The concerns raised about the proliferation of private tutoring were significant and the Committee considers that the potential for impact on homework and other elements of students' education is substantial. The use of private tutors is not new, but the scope of their activities has changed markedly. The motivations for using tutors have also changed and their proliferation raises some concerns.

In the past in the Australian school system, the use of tutors was largely seen as a remedial step – seeking assistance for an individual student who was struggling with a particular subject. It was usually seen as a short-term solution to dealing with a particular problem. In more recent times, however, the use of private tutors has been seen as less an issue of remediation, and more of gaining a competitive advantage. It is no longer students who are struggling with a subject who engage tutors, but high-achieving students for whom an extra percentage point or two in their final results is important.

This is of concern not because students or their parents are seeking an advantage in university entrance which, by definition, is a competitive environment. The concerns that have been raised with the Committee relate to the unintended consequences of the additional stress and pressure that could flow from the proliferation of private tutoring.

²⁵⁷ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

²⁵⁸ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

²⁵⁹ Ms Yvonne Kelley and Mr Michael Barr, *Submission 19*, 2.

There are a number of concerns about what has been dubbed ‘shadow education’:

- There is a risk that tutors will work independently from the curriculum being taught in schools and will not work with the formal education system but, at times, against it;
- There are concerns about the physical, emotional and mental welfare of the students who are being stretched by formal schooling and then often long hours of tutoring;
- There are equity issues, where parents who can ill-afford to pay what can be quite substantial fees are feeling pressure to engage a tutor so that their children can ‘keep up’, even if their children are doing well; and
- There are also concerns about the unregulated nature of the tutoring industry, with minimum standards lacking and where the tutor is not even required to know or understand the formal curriculum.

A recent report produced by the Asian Development Bank and the Comparative Education Research Centre at the University of Hong Kong has reflected these concerns, stating that in Asia, private tutoring:

*...may also dominate the lives of young people and their families, maintain and exacerbate social inequalities, divert needed household income into an unregulated industry, and create inefficiencies in education systems.*²⁶⁰

In the view of the authors of the report, the demand for tutoring is driven by a belief that the mainstream education system is inadequate and that the extra lessons provided by a private tutor are necessary for students to achieve academically.

The report also suggests that there can be negative effects on the well-being of students as ‘students commonly skip classes or sleep through lessons because they are tired after excessive external study’.²⁶¹

In public hearings, the issue of private tutoring was raised by a number of witnesses.

The Select Entry Schools that appeared before the Committee in public hearings raised the proliferation of tutoring as a key concern. Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, the Principal of Melbourne High School, the oldest government secondary school in Melbourne and one of the highest academic achievers, told the Committee that more than 60 per cent of their students received private tuition, with some students undertaking over 10 hours of private tuition per week in addition to the recommended hours of school-based study.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Asian Development Bank, *ABD study highlights dark side of ‘shadow education’*, <<http://www.adb.org/news/adb-study-highlights-dark-side-shadow-education>> viewed 5 May 2014.

²⁶¹ Asian Development Bank, *ABD study highlights dark side of ‘shadow education’*, <<http://www.adb.org/news/adb-study-highlights-dark-side-shadow-education>> viewed 5 May 2014.

²⁶² Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 4.

Of particular concern for Mr Ludowyke was that some of the tutoring was working not with the school-set work, but almost as an additional course of study – a parallel course. He told the Committee that:

*Rather than assisting students to complete course work set by the school, we found that in many instances tutors work effectively setting students a parallel course of study which itself was then generating its own homework demands upon students beyond that set by the school.*²⁶³

He said that one of the results of this was that students were undertaking twice the recommended amount of additional study than if they were doing homework set by their teachers.

Of particular concern to the Committee was the troubling suggestion by Mr Ludowyke that students were beginning to seek the assistance of the teachers in completing work set by their tutors.²⁶⁴ He told the Committee that:

*Somehow we seem to have completely reversed the roles of what is going on here. Often this work bears absolutely no relation to the prescribed curriculum and may be in contradiction in some instances to the prescribed curriculum.*²⁶⁵

This development is of significant concern to the Committee. It is certainly not the Committee's view that tutoring *per se* is a bad thing. It is for students and their parents to decide whether additional tuition will be beneficial. However, when the tutoring is not directly supporting the students' learning within the curriculum, and when it is burdening students with work to the extent that students have to seek the assistance of their teachers to do the tutor's work, it has clearly become disproportionate and has, as the Mr Ludowyke suggests, 'reversed the roles'.

Providing some context regarding the concerns about the proliferation of tutors, Mr Nick Fairlie, the Year 12 Co-ordinator of Melbourne High School told the Committee that:

*Because of the financial investment made by parents, students often feel their first loyalty is to their tutor and privilege this homework over that set by their teacher.*²⁶⁶

Mr Fairlie expressed the view that from the school's point of view, it would be preferable that students undertook activities that would enhance their well-being such as exercising, socialising or relaxing. He told the Committee that he regularly has to counsel Year 12 students who were suffering burn out because of 'this unnecessary work'.²⁶⁷

One of the further concerns about the proliferation of private tutors is that it tends to be a self-generating phenomenon, with students without tutors feeling that they are

²⁶³ Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 4.

²⁶⁴ Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 4.

²⁶⁵ Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 4.

²⁶⁶ Mr Nick Fairlie, Year 12 Coordinator, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

²⁶⁷ Mr Nick Fairlie, Year 12 Coordinator, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 4.

disadvantaged and thus seeking a tutor themselves, regardless of their own actual academic needs. Mr Fairlie told the Committee that:

*Parents have reported to me that they feel they have let their children down by not getting tutors and were investing heavily in a tutoring program to catch up.*²⁶⁸

This pressure is made worse by the tutors making themselves ‘indispensable to families’.²⁶⁹ It was suggested to the Committee that it is in the financial interests of the tutor to foster the belief that the student will not do as well without the tutor’s intervention. This belief that ‘you can’t do this without me’ instilled by some tutors has a more damaging effect than simply costing the families concerned money that they may not need to spend.

It could also have the effect of undermining the confidence of the student, a vital element of learning and can further undermine one of the key perceived benefits of homework, independence and autonomy.

Mr Fairlie also told the Committee that the tutoring arrangements can have the effect of setting up conflict between the student and their teacher. He suggested that teachers regularly report their frustration at ‘the battle they feel they are having with an anonymous, unseen third party’.²⁷⁰

The view that parents are placed under pressure to engage a tutor was also put by the Director of Curriculum of MacRobertson’s Girls High School, who told the Committee that:

*... there are a lot of students at MacRob who do feel disadvantaged if they do not have a tutor, if their parents cannot afford a tutor, and it becomes a financial pressure on a lot of parents who feel like they are letting their children down.*²⁷¹

There were also concerns that some tutors may be unfamiliar with the curriculum and how marks or grades are arrived at. Inappropriate and ill-informed involvement by tutors in the school’s grading was highlighted, with Ms Yvonne Arnott, Director of Curriculum at MacRobertson Girls High School telling the Committee that:

*I know of incidents where students have received a mark for a year 12 SAC and their tutor has contacted the school to complain about the mark... they have not seen all the work and they often do not know the context of how it is being marked, but they take an extreme interest and a pride in the idea that they have somehow helped a student achieve a particular mark...*²⁷²

She further suggests that the tutors not only don’t know the context of the mark, they do not know what the assignment is trying to achieve.²⁷³

²⁶⁸ Mr Nick Fairlie, Year 12 Coordinator, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁶⁹ Mr Nick Fairlie, Year 12 Coordinator, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁷⁰ Mr Nick Fairlie, Year 12 Coordinator, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁷¹ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁷² Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁷³ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

Ms Arnott also told the Committee of an example where a tutor was assisting a student with an essay on a film they were studying. The tutor convinced the student to write extensively about a clown, while there was no clown in the film. The tutor did not know the text at all and had convinced the student to write about something else. Not surprisingly, the student received a poor mark.²⁷⁴

While such examples are extreme and are unlikely to be the norm, it is of concern to the Committee that tutors are reaching beyond their proper role of assisting students with their curriculum-based work and helping them with their learning.

A related issue is the unregulated nature of the tutoring ‘industry’. For a cohort that plays a large and increasingly significant role in the education of our children, it is of concern that there are no minimum standards for private tutors. Mr Ludowyke told the Committee that:

*...the tutoring industry is a completely unregulated industry. There is nothing to stop anyone putting up their shingle and saying they are a professional tutor. They may have no formal qualification in education whatsoever or no contemporary one. There is actually no regulation about who could act as a tutor.*²⁷⁵

This issue is not confined to Victoria, or even Australia. There have been moves to regulate private tutors in other countries. The Centre for Market Reform of Education in the United Kingdom announced in 2013, that it was planning to establish the first national association for tutors, with the backing of major tutoring companies, to develop industry standards.²⁷⁶ These proposed changes appear to be based around the establishment of a peak tutoring association comprising leading tutoring firms, which indicates a self-regulation and voluntary standards model. Enforceable standards are likely to require legislative change. However, despite the limitations of the establishment of a peak body, it is at least recognition that an industry with no regulation and limited, if any, standards may not serve the education system or society well.

Australia does have a national tutoring body, the Australian Tutoring Association. This association, which was established in 2005 and has 550 member tutoring companies, is likely to provide valuable input into issues of regulation, accreditation and standards and should be involved in any review of the tutoring industry.

To date in Australia the ‘tutoring industry’ remains unregulated and is required to meet no formal standards. The only clear accountability is likely to be through Consumer Affairs where a tutor could be held accountable for not providing an advertised service. In Victoria, a tutor or tutoring company would be required to meet the requirements of the *Australian Consumer Law and Fair Trade Act 2011*, as do all service providers. Neither the Department

²⁷⁴ Ms Yvette Arnott, Director of Curriculum, Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

²⁷⁵ Mr Jeremy Ludowyke, Principal, Melbourne High School, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 15 April 2013, 7.

²⁷⁶ Graeme Paton, ‘New plan to crack down on poorly-qualified private tutors’, *The Telegraphy (United Kingdom)*, 22 May 2013. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10071515/New-plan-to-crack-down-on-poorly-qualified-private-tutors.html> viewed 1 July 2014.

nor the Victorian Institute of Teaching (VIT) has any role in the accreditation or monitoring of private tutors. The protections provided for the consumer is not equivalent to the establishment of professional standards or accreditation.

As stated earlier, the Committee is not suggesting that the engagement of tutors is, in itself, of no value and that parents should not commit to it. There will be some students and some circumstances when a tutor would make a significant difference to a student's understanding or skill level and this can, in turn, improve learning outcomes. The Committee does, however, consider that it is essential that tutors work strictly within the formal curriculum and understand that their role is to assist the student within that curriculum. The Committee believes that tutors should be seen as an adjunct to, rather than an alternative to, the education system.

The Committee also considers that some minimum standards and possibly accreditation are required to ensure that parents know when they are engaging a tutor to assist their child's learning, they are employing someone who is familiar with and understands the formal curriculum, is suitably qualified and who will work within the education system.

FINDING 10

The proliferation of private tutors may place undue financial pressure on families and has the potential to undermine the value of the assistance they can provide, by shifting the focus from the work assigned by the teacher to work assigned by the tutor.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT

The Committee recommends that the Government considers whether regulatory and accreditation arrangements for private tutors may be justified and, in consultation with the tutoring industry, schools and parent bodies determines what form such arrangements may take.

CHAPTER 6: DISADVANTAGE ARISING FROM HOMEWORK

*In addition to reading and math deficits, students with learning disabilities often demonstrate behaviours that have a negative effect on the organization, attention, perseverance necessary to the process of doing homework.*²⁷⁷

Bryan, Burstein & Bryan

Previous chapters have shown how homework can reinforce learning. However, depending on the type of homework it has the potential to cause inequities between students. This inequality arises as students have different support structures and different access to resources, which can affect not only the quality of the homework, but also the ability to complete it. For example, students from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally have greater access to resources and materials such as computers and tutors. These students are also less likely to be forced to choose between family responsibilities or work and homework.²⁷⁸ Teachers need to be mindful of such factors when setting homework tasks. The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) noted that if access to certain resources is assumed, some students may be unable to complete the task.²⁷⁹ This chapter examines some of the types of disadvantage faced by Victorian students. It also looks at ways to address these inequities to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to learn.

6.1 Types of disadvantage

The Committee examined the impacts homework has on students from indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, as well as those with a disability and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. This section provides an overview of some of the issues confronted by these groups when faced with homework. Some individuals may experience more than one form of disadvantage at any time. Given homework is meant to reinforce learning, not be a barrier, it is important that as many potential impediments as possible are identified and removed. This will ensure that young people remain engaged in their education and become productive members of society. Research comparing the results of minority groups from a number of countries, found that if students are unable to complete their homework because they lack access to key equipment, such as computers and the internet, they may disengage and drop out of school. As this group has not completed their education they may experience difficulties finding employment. Failure to

²⁷⁷ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 176.

²⁷⁸ M Galloway, J Corner and D Pope, 'Nonacademic effects of homework in privileged, high-performing high schools' (2013) 4(81) *The Journal of Experimental Education* 490, 494.

²⁷⁹ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission* 21, 7.

redress inequality in education may result in problems, such as criminality or substance abuse, which become more costly to address.

*Educational attainment is particularly critical due to its impact on labour market success, and because it reduces the risk of other negative social outcomes, such as criminality and substance abuse.*²⁸⁰

6.1.1 Language/Cultural

Cultural groups tend to congregate together. English may be a second language for these children, and they may attend remote or relatively poor schools.²⁸¹ This is also true for Australia's indigenous population.²⁸² Students from a refugee or migrant background are confronted by a number of issues, the first one usually being language. These students may have difficulty finding someone to practice their language skills with, especially outside of school hours and they may lack confidence to speak in front of groups.²⁸³ In its written submission CMY characterised this group as follows:

- no or minimal formal schooling in their first language;
- low levels of literacy in English;
- lived in insecure societies where civil order and services have broken down;
- experienced extreme violence and the after effects of trauma;
- lost family and may be without parental/sibling support;
- had disrupted schooling due to movement within and between countries so that literacy skills are not consolidated in any one language; and
- have come from a language background where writing is a relatively new phenomenon.²⁸⁴

As a result of the above, this group in particular could benefit from the additional preparation and practice of homework.²⁸⁵ However, Whittlesea Community Connections (WCC) notes that often these groups lacked adequate support structures to successfully complete homework tasks. For example, the students may not know any peers who could assist them and their parents may also possess low levels of English proficiency.²⁸⁶ In his evidence to the Committee, Professor Hattie noted similar issues in New Zealand, where parents wanted to help their children, but didn't know how.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁰ Steve Bradley, Mirko Draca et al, 'The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in Australia' (2007) 3(20) *Journal of Population Economics* 547, 548.

²⁸¹ Steve Bradley, Mirko Draca et al, 'The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in Australia' (2007) 3(20) *Journal of Population Economics* 547, 548.

²⁸² Steve Bradley, Mirko Draca et al, 'The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in Australia' (2007) 3(20) *Journal of Population Economics* 547, 548.

²⁸³ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 9.

²⁸⁴ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 5.

²⁸⁵ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 3.

²⁸⁶ Whittlesea Community Connections, *Submission 21*, 5.

²⁸⁷ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

Other cultural factors can impact on a student's ability to complete their homework. The Committee received evidence from Professor Horsley that in some cultures the eldest children look after the younger ones, and do the housework/meal preparation. Having to carry out these responsibilities each night may impact a student's ability to complete their homework.²⁸⁸ The parents therefore need to be educated about what is expected of students so they can review these responsibilities.

To an extent, immigration can change roles within families, as children take on the role of translator, which over time may cause familial relations to become strained.²⁸⁹ The role of translator can pose problems, such as parent-teacher interviews, especially if students are asked to translate negative things about themselves. The Committee received anecdotal evidence from Michael Barr of students deliberately incorrectly translating a teacher's comments leading their parent to believe their child was performing well in class.

I would say, 'Pierre, you are not doing very well, blah, blah, blah' and he would then translate that to his mother as, 'I'm doing brilliantly'. I finally twigged to this, sent him out of the room and we managed to get by.²⁹⁰

In Victoria, the Department has sought to address this problem by providing a range of interpreting and translation services to schools. These services range from translating a school's homework policy into another language to assisting a school communicate with parents. Schools do not need to pay to access these services as all these costs are borne by the Department.²⁹¹

Although they may understand work in class, research has shown that the lack of a support structure at home may mean this group is unwilling or unable to complete homework on their own.

While they may be willing to tackle an academic task within the supportive context of the classroom environment with their teacher and peers within easy reach, they may avoid completing independent homework for fear of making mistakes.²⁹²

Homework assigned to students from a refugee/migrant background needs to be achievable, given they may not only be trying to grasp new concepts, but also a new language. Research has shown that as a consequence of this, students from this group often lag behind their English-speaking peers in academic achievement.²⁹³ Assigning the same work to both English and non-English speakers may cause this group to disengage.

²⁸⁸ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 19.

²⁸⁹ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 7.

²⁹⁰ Mr Michael Barr, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 8.

²⁹¹ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 5.

²⁹² Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 4..

²⁹³ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 3.

*Each homework assignment that is out of reach for immigrant students arguably places them at a position of cumulative disadvantage – failed opportunities to learn, negative teacher perceptions, lower academic self-efficacy, and academic disengagement over time.*²⁹⁴

The research on how homework should be designed to accommodate the needs of this group is limited.²⁹⁵ Some of these issues can be redressed by this group participating in a homework club, which is discussed later in this chapter.²⁹⁶

6.1.2 Socio-Economic

Family socio-economic status is one of the most important factors related to a child's academic performance.²⁹⁷ In its written submission, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service noted that low-income households are particularly affected by increasing education costs, especially in relation to technology.²⁹⁸ Families may not be able to afford one computer or tablet, let alone one per child. This means that the children may not be able to fully participate in class, or complete their homework. Another barrier arises if a family has children at different schools; it may not be possible to pass devices between children as each school may require a particular device to be purchased. The Committee understands there is a move towards accommodating a range of devices on school networks, with evidence received from Bendigo Senior Secondary College (BSSC) even though that it has an arrangement with a computer manufacturer for students to purchase devices, its network permitted students to use their own devices.²⁹⁹

The Committee also received evidence from Good Shepherd on the potential for technology to assist this group. In the move to online learning, some schools no longer require the purchase of expensive textbooks, instead requiring the purchase of an app which costs considerably less. Although the app may cost less than a text book it may not be possible to pass this down to another child in the family, or purchase this second hand (as can be done with text books).³⁰⁰

*With the shift to technologies, yes, you do need to buy the iPad, but the app cost is considerably less than the textbook cost.*³⁰¹

As homework demands have increased, students need to work harder. This may not be possible for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, as they may have competing

²⁹⁴ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 4.

²⁹⁵ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 6.

²⁹⁶ Dr Kathy Landvogt, Social Policy & Research Unit Manager, Good Shepherd, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 28.

²⁹⁷ Hee Jin Bang, 'Promising homework practices: teachers' perspectives on making homework work for newcomer immigrant students' (2011) 2(95) *The Highschool Journal* 3, 6.

²⁹⁸ Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service, *Submission 5*, 15.

²⁹⁹ Ms Meredith Fettleing, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 7.

³⁰⁰ Dr Kathy Landvogt, Social Policy & Research Unit Manager, Good Shepherd, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 11.

³⁰¹ Dr Kathy Landvogt, Social Policy & Research Unit Manager, Good Shepherd, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 11.

demands from family and employment that prevent the completion of even minor tasks.³⁰² Harris Cooper has noted that:

...homework may increase time-on-task for better students from better homes, but at the same time, for disadvantaged children, create frustrating situations that are detrimental to learning. In such cases, homework may contribute to social ill, rather than help remedy it.³⁰³

The average income for a person of Aboriginal or Torres Straight Island background has been estimated as about 65 per cent of the income of other Australians.³⁰⁴ This means that students from these groups will experience a degree of economic disadvantage. This could range from not having breakfast before school, making it difficult to concentrate,³⁰⁵ to not having enough money for uniforms, books or extracurricular activities.

A study comparing the performance of indigenous students to their peers found aboriginal students record a higher level of absenteeism than non-aboriginal students. This means they lose more school time and fall behind their peers. This can have long term impacts and affect their ability to find employment:

Indigenous students are substantially more likely to be suspended or expelled from school and lose on average 2 to 4 years of schooling through absenteeism. The equivalent figure for non-indigenous groups is about one-half of the indigenous level.³⁰⁶

Consequently studies have indicated that at the age of 10 years indigenous students are approximately 1 year behind their peers in literacy and numeracy.³⁰⁷ This means it is difficult for them to complete their homework, and may result in them disengaging from their education earlier than their peers.

6.1.3 Learning Disability

Learning disabilities can include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD);
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD);
- Asperger Syndrome;
- Depression;
- Dyscalculia;
- Dyslexia;

³⁰² Merith Cosden, Gale Morrison et al, 'When homework is not home work: After-school programs for homework assistance' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 211, 211.

³⁰³ Etta Kralovec and John Buell, *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning* (2000) Beacon Press, 67.

³⁰⁴ Rebecca Fleming and Beth Southwell, 'An investigation of some factors in the education of indigenous Australians' (Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research Education Annual Conference, Paramatta, 2005), 5.

³⁰⁵ Rebecca Fleming and Beth Southwell, 'An investigation of some factors in the education of indigenous Australians' (Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research Education Annual Conference, Paramatta, 2005), 8.

³⁰⁶ Steve Bradley, Mirko Draca et al, 'The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in Australia' (2007) 3(20) *Journal of Population Economics* 547, 550.

³⁰⁷ Steve Bradley, Mirko Draca et al, 'The magnitude of educational disadvantage of indigenous minority groups in Australia' (2007) 3(20) *Journal of Population Economics* 547, 549.

- Dyspraxia;
- Epilepsy; and
- High Functioning Autism.

Ann Williams suggested to the Committee that Australia is about 40 years behind the rest of the world in relation to recognising and addressing learning disabilities.³⁰⁸ Children with learning disabilities are characterised as having poor working memories and less efficient brains.³⁰⁹ As such studies have found that students with learning disabilities experience more difficulties with homework than their peers without disabilities.³¹⁰ This may be because the homework is inappropriate and consequently these students need more time than their peers to complete the same tasks. It was suggested to the Committee that examples of inappropriate homework for a dyscalculating child may be to rote learn their 2 times table, or expecting a dyslexic child to learn a list of spelling words. Anne Williams advised that some dyslexic children can read, but none of them can spell.³¹¹

Although homework may be more difficult for this group to complete, research suggests that homework can have positive effects on achievement for students with learning disabilities.³¹² Students with learning disabilities generally have difficulty completing homework for a range of reasons such as, they may be easily distracted, procrastinate; have problems working independently; have short attention spans, memory deficits and lack of organisational skills.³¹³

*In addition to reading and math deficits, students with learning disabilities often demonstrate behaviours that have a negative effect on the organization, attention, perseverance necessary to the process of doing homework.*³¹⁴

Research suggests that students with learning disabilities gain the greatest benefit from homework that is short and focuses on reinforcement of skills learnt rather than extending them.³¹⁵

If teachers differentiated homework it would help some of these children, however there is pressure on the children to 'fit in' and do the same work as their peers.³¹⁶ It is generally agreed that teachers should assign homework that takes into account the needs of the

³⁰⁸ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 4.

³⁰⁹ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 2.

³¹⁰ Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 166.

³¹¹ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 3.

³¹² Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 36.

³¹³ Nicole Schrat Carr, 'Increasing the effectiveness of homework for all learners in the inclusive classroom' (2013) 1(23) *School Community Journal* 169, 176; Tanis Bryan and Karen Burstein, 'Improving homework completion and academic performance: Lessons from special education' (2004) 3(43) *Theory Into Practice* 213, 213.

³¹⁴ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 176.

³¹⁵ Harris Cooper, *The battle over homework* (2007) Corwin Press, 36.

³¹⁶ The Dyslexia and L D Network-Bayside, *Submission* 15, 5.

students. This is especially the case of children with learning disabilities in mainstream schools. Research has shown that tasks which may be simple for some students may take a student with a learning disability a considerable amount of time to comprehend and complete.

*... picking up a book from the library and bringing it to class may be a 5-minute operation for most students, However, for a student with disabilities who may be unfamiliar with the organization of a library ... this may be beyond the scope of his or her ability without specific assistance.*³¹⁷

A survey in the US found that although teachers regularly assigned homework, few took a students learning disability into account.³¹⁸ There is also uncertainty about whether these students have held to the same standards as their peers when teachers mark the assignments.³¹⁹ The Committee was advised that it has been estimated that 10 to 15 per cent of the Victorian population has a learning disability. These children often do not qualify for support for the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD); however they do have additional needs.³²⁰ Despite the relative prevalence of learning disabilities in the classroom, the Committee was advised that there is no mandatory training for teachers to identify and teach these children.³²¹ Without adequate training teachers will be unable to adapt lesson plans to address these issues and minimise any inequity in homework assignments.³²²

*... the initial teacher education (ITE) courses in Australia were very mixed in their provision of courses about LDs for mainstream students. However, some universities did offer their ITE students a short, one semester, unit about LDs, but only as an elective.*³²³

The knowledge gap between children with a learning disability and their peers increases as they progress through their education. Research suggests they spend less time on homework, have lower expectations and less confidence.³²⁴ This may arise from their inability to grasp some concepts in the allocated timeframe or from the fact they have been stigmatised by being set different homework. This further isolates these students because they cannot complete the homework with their friends.

FINDING 11

Homework may need to be adapted for children with learning disabilities to ensure they obtain the same benefit from homework as their peers.

³¹⁷ Sarah McNary, Neal Glasgow and Cathy Hicks, *What successful teachers do in inclusive classrooms* (1967) Corwin press, 8.

³¹⁸ Tanis Bryan and Karen Burstein, 'Improving homework completion and academic performance: Lessons from special education' (2004) 3(43) *Theory Into Practice* 213, 214.

³¹⁹ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 167.

³²⁰ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 4.

³²¹ Ms Ann Williams, Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 4.

³²² Rowville Secondary College Council, *Submission 16*, 2.

³²³ The Dyslexia and L D Network-Bayside, *Submission 15*, 4.

³²⁴ Tanis Bryan, Karen Burstein and James Byran, 'Students with learning disabilities: Homework problems and promising practices' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 167, 171.

RECOMMENDATION NINE

That the Department offer professional development to teachers covering the main types of learning disabilities and offering strategies on how to adapt homework plans to accommodate their different needs.

6.2 Breaking the cycle: Homework Clubs

6.2.1 Operation

It is perhaps stating the obvious that it is easier to complete homework in a quiet space with appropriate lighting and access to books and computers.³²⁵ However, not all students have access to such an environment at home. In addition to providing access to volunteers to assist with homework, homework clubs can provide such an environment to facilitate students to complete their homework.

Assistance with homework is going to be the key to learning and development for new learning tasks. We really think that homework study centres have a lot to offer not just in providing scaffolding but sometimes bridging the school and the community and offering a third space.³²⁶

Homework clubs offer a means of redressing inequity arising from homework. These programs come in a number of forms, as each seeks to address the needs of their local community. As such there are also a number of names for these programs. For the purposes of this report the phrase 'homework clubs' will be used. However in other jurisdictions and publications these bodies may also be referred to as homework or learning clinics, centres, programs or institutes.³²⁷

At its simplest, a homework club supports students who may be struggling with their homework. This is not to be confused with a supervised study period. Rather homework clubs involve volunteers engaging with students to assist them understand and complete their homework. Research has shown that supervised study periods have little benefit for students who are struggling as it is just a matter of surveillance.³²⁸ The clubs take place for a couple of hours after school or on the weekend, and may take place at a school, library, community agency or other community facility. Homework clubs draw extensively on the local community, with assistance generally provided by volunteers. Once again the location and timing is determined by local needs. Some homework clubs operate on a needs basis, allowing students to rotate in and out depending on their academic performance, while other clubs may require students to attend for a term or more.³²⁹ These are places where

³²⁵ Etta Kralovec and John Buell, *The end of homework: How homework disrupts families, overburdens children, and limits learning* (2000) Beacon Press, 67.

³²⁶ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 15.

³²⁷ Joseph Sanacore, 'Homework clubs for young adolescents who struggle with learning' (2002) 2(76) *The Clearing House* 98, 99.

³²⁸ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 5.

³²⁹ Joseph Sanacore, 'Homework clubs for young adolescents who struggle with learning' (2002) 2(76) *The Clearing House* 98, 99.

students attend to receive help with homework from school. They are not a form of group tutoring above and beyond what has been taught in the classroom.

*Homework centres can come in all sorts of different colours and shapes with varying degrees of community support.*³³⁰

Homework clubs fill a vital role by providing students with access to information and technology they may not have at home, particularly clubs that operate out of a local or school library.³³¹ Access to computers is increasingly important for students as more curriculum content is delivered through online resources. Computers, however, can be a distraction to students. Professor Horsley advised the Committee that at the homework clubs he operated in New South Wales, the computer room opened about 45 minutes after the program commenced. This provided students an opportunity to plan what they needed to do, reducing the likelihood of distractions.

Learning to search on the internet to answer homework questions is a real skill, so there were always one or two tutors in the computer room. We never opened the computer room at the same time as we opened the centre. They can only go in there after three-quarters of an hour when they had formulated what they needed to find out³³²

WCC advised the Committee that students can access computers, printers and photocopiers at their office. Their program at Lalor Secondary College is well attended as students need the resources offered.³³³ Homework clubs can therefore address the equity issue relating to access to computers and the internet.



Homework clubs provide both a supported environment and facilities.

CMY advised that some homework clubs offer sporting activities in an attempt to get students to engage with their homework. The Committee received evidence about two such programs run by CMY in Springvale and Dandenong that offer students the ability to play basketball or soccer providing they attend the

homework centre and complete their homework. This has the added benefit of helping children to socialise and form friendships, as well as improving their academic performance.

³³⁰ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 23.

³³¹ Briony Train, Clare Nankivell et al, *The value and impact of homework clubs in public libraries*, report for Library and Information Commission (2000), 67.

³³² Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 20.

³³³ Ms Sarah Haintz, Youth Worker, Whittlesea Community Connections, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 7.

These programs allow these children to socialise in a broader circle and has the added benefit of permitting them to practice their language skills in an informal setting.

*The outcomes and the benefits of this are that it also gives the young people social connections which previously they did not have. They are starting to build a bigger friendships network and getting to know young people from a whole range of other cultures as well. That is one of the beauties of those homework groups.*³³⁴

Another success of this approach is that sport is not only used to engage these students, but also to motivate them to study. The Committee received evidence from Soo-Lin Quek from CMY that some students are motivated by the sporting activities to become referees or coaches. When they realise that they need to have a certain level of education, it becomes motivation to study harder.

*That is one way we hook them back into the schools through their interest in and passion for sport. You may not want to go to school, but you want to become a coach or a referee, so you still have to sit the tests. It is how we balance it and bring the right combination of ingredients into that student-centred approach that we often have.*³³⁵

Homework clubs in Victoria are largely coordinated through CMY, a not-for-profit organisation that has provided support services to migrant and refugee young people across Victoria for over 20 years. Homework clubs are structured around the needs of the participants and these needs can vary greatly from one homework club to another. This can be both a strength and weakness of this devolved structure. For example the types of activities and the level of academic support offered can vary from club to club.³³⁶ As discussed previously, some homework clubs in Victoria offer a sporting component, while others do not. The lack of consistent standards means that the goals set and the outcomes realised will vary from club to club.³³⁷

There are no consistent standards adopted by program providers and funders to ensure program quality (eg student safety, tutor quality and long term financial sustainability).³³⁸

Financial uncertainty combined with the reliance on volunteers may mean it is difficult for homework clubs across the state to provide a consistent level of academic support. Volunteers may not be experts where students need support, and this support may not be able to be purchased. The challenge is to build on the success of these programs, while striving to offer all students the same educational opportunities.

³³⁴ Ms Soo-Lin Quek, Manager, Knowledge and Advocacy, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 8.

³³⁵ Ms Soo-Lin Quek, Manager, Knowledge and Advocacy, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 12.

³³⁶ Merith Cosden, Gale Morrison et al, 'When homework is not home work: After-school programs for homework assistance' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 211, 213.

³³⁷ Merith Cosden, Gale Morrison et al, 'When homework is not home work: After-school programs for homework assistance' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 211, 212.

³³⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 4.

RECOMMENDATION TEN

That the Department identifies the number of homework clubs in operation across the state and examines ways to ensure students of all abilities from across the State are able to access the support they require in such settings.

6.2.2 Location and Access

Venue access is an important consideration in the success of homework clubs. This includes both the physical location and the times of operation. The two most common locations for homework clubs in Victoria are schools and local libraries, each having its own advantages and disadvantages. For example homework clubs that operate from local libraries allow students to socialise with students from other schools, and access a wide range of resources.³³⁹ However, it also means they have to travel to this location after school. This may be difficult for students in primary school, and discourage attendance.

We find that generally they are based at the schools probably in Victoria, especially for the primary level. The primary students are very hard to move to external programs. ... We found that is probably the best model and most successful model — where the community comes in and supports the school.³⁴⁰

Locating homework clubs in a school means that it is in an environment that students and parents are familiar with, and eliminates the travel issue. It may mean, however, that participation in the club is generally limited to students from that school. The Committee was advised by WCC that a key element in the success of homework clubs at schools was ensuring the staff supported it. Teachers are important in the success of homework clubs, because they can identify students who may need assistance with homework and would benefit from attending the club. Without teachers encouraging students to attend it will be more difficult to gain student participation.

*It is also really important to have the schools on board. We have had other homework clubs run at some other schools that we have stopped running because the teachers just were not on board. Without them encouraging the students to come along, you just do not get the same outcomes and the same level of attendance.*³⁴¹

From an operational point of view, it can be easier to base a homework club in a school, because these facilities are usually provided at no cost, and the schools usually also cover any insurance costs. School facilities are therefore more appealing than other community facilities, such as local halls and libraries.

³³⁹ Joseph Sanacore, 'Homework clubs for young adolescents who struggle with learning' (2002) 2(76) *The Clearing House* 98, 100.

³⁴⁰ Mr Placid Jayasuriya, Acting Coordinator Education Support, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 7.

³⁴¹ Ms Peta Fualau, Team Leader, Settlement Services, Whittlesea Community Connections, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 8.

*There are some programs in church halls and so on, but again there are always issues around OHS, and there are no standards around that. We know school venues have all that certified ...*³⁴²

Homework clubs that operate out of schools usually operate as soon as school finishes. This means that students who participate in extracurricular activities or who rely on public transport (especially in remote or regional areas) may be unable to attend.³⁴³ The Committee received evidence from Professor Horsley that the success of the homework clubs he started in New South Wales related to the fact they began at 6.00 p.m., allowing time for these extracurricular activities.

*The big con for these communities is the students staying at the school to get the assistance, which some students would access but many students would not. They wanted to go to football training or go home and do their chores. That is why we ran ours at night from 6.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m., because it was related to the culture of the group.*³⁴⁴

6.2.3 Resourcing

A key provider of homework clubs in Victoria is CMY, through their 'Learning Beyond the Bell' (LBB) program. CMY currently operate over 250 homework clubs in Victoria.³⁴⁵ Participation in these clubs is not restricted to refugee and migrant students, however these groups do dominate most clubs.³⁴⁶ Currently the Government provides \$1 million in funding annually for this program.³⁴⁷ This funding arrangement commenced in 2008, and is due to expire in December 2015.³⁴⁸ These funds are primarily used to build capacity within homework centres by training and recruiting volunteers, rather than fund their day-to-day operations. They are also used to fund five positions to support the homework clubs - four in the metropolitan area and one in Ballarat.³⁴⁹

*Learning Beyond the Bell provides support to homework programs in the form of capacity building, volunteer recruitment and training, resourcing and partnership development. It is delivered to homework clubs in metropolitan Melbourne as well as rural and regional Victoria.*³⁵⁰

There are other community organisations and schools that operate homework clubs. These clubs are funded by these organisations outside of this input from the Government. WCC operates four homework clubs at various locations in Melbourne's northern suburbs.³⁵¹

³⁴² Mr Placid Jayasuriya, Acting Coordinator Education Support, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 7.

³⁴³ Dr Kathy Landvogt, Social Policy & Research Unit Manager, Good Shepherd, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 31.

³⁴⁴ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 22.

³⁴⁵ Ms Soo-Lin Quek, Manager, Knowledge and Advocacy, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 2.

³⁴⁶ Ms Soo-Lin Quek, Manager, Knowledge and Advocacy, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 2.

³⁴⁷ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 37.

³⁴⁸ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 3.

³⁴⁹ Ms Sarah Nicholson, Acting Manager Sector and Community Partnerships, Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 3.

³⁵⁰ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 3.

³⁵¹ Two are in schools (a secondary school and a local primary school) and two are run out of the WCC office.

Although these programs initially received funding as part of the LBB program, this no longer occurs. WCC now has to look to other sources of funding to continue this program. This process ranges from applying for other grants, to their own fundraising. Given homework clubs generally support those experiencing a form of disadvantage, the Committee notes there is uncertainty regarding how long the local community would be able to fund this program without the intervention of an external injection of funding. In a public hearing, the Committee was told by WCC that:

*For us it is just fundraising and applying for grants wherever we can to try to keep them going. But we have no ongoing, sustainable funding, which is one of the issues, because it makes it difficult to have some certainty around them. I suppose we can only support them without funding for so long.*³⁵²

BSSC operates its own homework club. This was initially set up as a joint initiative with the Bendigo Local Indigenous Network, the Goldfield Local Learning and Employment network and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.³⁵³ This program is now open to students from the wider community and given the limited transport options, BSSC even operates a bus to pick up and drop off students so they can attend. Like CMY's program, the BSSC homework club operates with a paid employee to coordinate the activities. The program however is dependent on volunteers.³⁵⁴

The benefits of homework clubs can be difficult to measure, or may take time. In the absence of qualitative data, it can be difficult to secure funding. Although the data is limited, it has been suggested that after school programs such as homework clubs can prevent children failing by provide a support structure that they would otherwise not have.³⁵⁵ Homework clubs have also been credited with a decrease in behavioural problems and an improvement in communication and social skills, increased self-confidence and self-esteem and lower levels of depression amongst participants.³⁵⁶

*Participation in after-school programs has been associated with increased price, self-worth, and social responsibility; feelings of confidence regarding achievement of goals; and prosocial behaviour, self-concept, cooperation and self-efficacy.*³⁵⁷

Current funding arrangements may not permit the hiring of specialist tutors to fill a particular need. In its written submission, WCC suggest that funding arrangements need to be both flexible and certain. This would enable programs to adapt quickly to changing needs and allow certainty when forward planning of services.

³⁵² Ms Peta Fualau, Team Leader, Settlement Services, Whittlesea Community Connections, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 15.

³⁵³ Indigenous Governance Toolkit, *Bendigo indigenous homework centre (BIHC)*, <<http://www.reconciliation.org.au/governance/case-studies/bendigo-indigenous-homework-centre-bihc>> viewed 3 December 2013; Bendigo Senior Secondary College, *Indigenous students*, <<http://www.bssc.edu.au/students/indigenous>> viewed 1 July 2014.

³⁵⁴ Ms Meredith Fetting, Assistant Principal, Bendigo Secondary College, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 47.

³⁵⁵ Merith Cosden, Gale Morrison et al, 'When homework is not home work: After-school programs for homework assistance' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 211, 211.

³⁵⁶ Whittlesea Community Connections, *Submission 21*, 6.

³⁵⁷ Merith Cosden, Gale Morrison et al, 'When homework is not home work: After-school programs for homework assistance' (2001) 3(36) *Educational Psychologist* 211, 213.

*Program funding needs to be flexible so that the program is able to reflect the changing needs of students, such as the use of specialist tutors as required. The LSP should be funded adequately to reflect these costs, including the confidence to develop programs over multiple years, not be reliant on year to year funding.*³⁵⁸

The uncertainty of homework club funding is not just an Australian issue. International experience such as that from the United Kingdom suggests similar concerns.

*Although this parent cited the library-based homework club as the direct reason for her son's improved academic record, such long-term benefits are difficult to quantify and as such are often ignored by library service managers. Quantitative statistics are a more straightforward means of justifying a service to senior management or funding bodies.*³⁵⁹

Aside from funding, homework clubs are constrained by two factors, space at a venue and the number of tutors. WCC advised the Committee that its program at Thomastown Primary School is currently at capacity (20 students) and they are forced to turn students away.³⁶⁰ The availability of tutors is especially important given CMY's target of a 1:1 student to tutor ratio.³⁶¹

*Many programs however, are constrained in their capacity to improve these elements in their programs. They struggle to be financially sustainable and rely on the goodwill of volunteers.*³⁶²

Volunteers range from retirees to university students to individuals who just want to assist their community.³⁶³ What is apparent to the Committee is that communities with a homework club have a strong sense of ownership of it, and the operation of these clubs is reliant on these volunteers.

FINDING 12

Homework clubs provide a vital service for students who experience a form of disadvantage. They engage students who may otherwise drop out of the system.

³⁵⁸ Whittlesea Community Connections, *Submission 21*, 6.

³⁵⁹ Briony Train, Clare Nankivell et al, *The value and impact of homework clubs in public libraries*, report for Commission (2000), 66.

³⁶⁰ Ms Peta Fualau, Team Leader, Settlement Services, Whittlesea Community Connections, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 30 April 2014, 7.

³⁶¹ Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 9.

³⁶² Centre for Multicultural Youth, *Submission 21*, 4.

³⁶³ Mr Chris Thompson, Director Priority Projects Branch, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 6.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN

That the Department undertake a review of homework clubs to ensure their long-term viability.

6.2.4 Family Benefits

Homework clubs not only assist vulnerable students, they also assist and support the family structure. The home is an important place to reinforce the learning that occurs at school.³⁶⁴ Demographics indicate that over time there has been an increase in both the number of households where both parents work, and the number of single parent households. These parents may wish to assist their children with their homework, but they may not be able to due to circumstances beyond their control. Homework clubs are one means of ensuring these students receive the support they require to advance their education.³⁶⁵

*Some parents know how to help kids with homework. There is nothing wrong with that, but unfortunately we are spreading the equity gap.*³⁶⁶

Professor Horsley suggested that attendance at homework club requires a commitment from both the student and their family. This is because in some low-income households students may have to work after school or look after younger siblings.³⁶⁷ This may mean they do not have time to complete homework, even if they wanted to. Thus, in order to attend the homework centre these barriers must be broken down.

*Some cultural patterns exist. What does that mean? It means that the girl in year 11 will have to look after the younger siblings if the parents are not home and then prepare the meal. In other words, just the general structure of the home would mean that the girl or the boy – boys also do it – probably would not have time to do homework.*³⁶⁸

Professor Horsley noted that in his experience homework clubs had been successful in helping children improve academically, however it required support from their family by changing the expectations placed on the child. By encouraging children to attend homework clubs, parents can demonstrate that they value education.

*Many of those children who would not have achieved much beforehand went on to, say, get university places. Why? Because the family valued their education but there had to be a break in the cultural script for them to achieve and to get the support they needed.*³⁶⁹

Some homework clubs also encourage parental involvement. This helps parents understand what their child is learning, and as a consequence improve their knowledge as well. For

³⁶⁴ Joseph Sanacore, 'Homework clubs for young adolescents who struggle with learning' (2002) 2(76) *The Clearing House* 98, 98.

³⁶⁵ Joseph Sanacore, 'Homework clubs for young adolescents who struggle with learning' (2002) 2(76) *The Clearing House* 98, 98.

³⁶⁶ Professor John Hattie, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 29 April 2014, 3.

³⁶⁷ Harris Cooper, 'Homework for all – in moderation' (2001) 7(58) *Educational Leadership* 34, 35.

³⁶⁸ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 19.

³⁶⁹ Professor Mike Horsley, Co-author of 'Reforming Homework', Central Queensland University, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 19.

example parents in a refugee family may find their English improves from attending the homework club with their child. Alan Ross, General Manager, National Partnerships, Independent Schools Victoria gave evidence that this means it is easier for them to navigate the services they require, and places less pressure on the child to act as interpreter.

In some of these homework clubs the parents were encouraged to come in as well to be with their children when they were doing their homework and to develop skills with the parents and improve their English.³⁷⁰



Homework can lead to engagement between students and their parents and families.

Rather than taking responsibility for a child's education away from parents, homework clubs can bring families closer together. The involvement of parents has contributed to the success of some homework clubs in some communities.³⁷¹

Adopted by the Education and Training Committee

Parliament House, East Melbourne

24 June 2014

³⁷⁰ Mr Alan Ross, General Manager, National Partnerships, Independent Schools Victoria, *Transcript of evidence*, Melbourne, 28 April 2014, 7.

³⁷¹ Rebecca Fleming and Beth Southwell, 'An investigation of some factors in the education of indigenous Australians' (Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research Education Annual Conference, Paramatta, 2005), 10.

Appendix A – List of Written Submissions

	Individual or organisation	Date received
1	Ms Marie Odendaal	5 December 2013
2	Mr Don Jewel	6 December 2013
3	Mr Shayne Keenan	22 December 2013
4	Hon. Peter Collier MLC, Minister for Education, Department of Education, Western Australia Government	8 January 2014
5	Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service	23 January 2014
6	Ms Jacinta Cashen	29 January 2014
7	Dr Jim Watterson, Director-General, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland Government	29 January 2014
8	Mr Marcus L'Estrange	4 February 2014
9	Ms Paula Hayes	5 February 2014
10	Ms Robyn Cotter	5 February 2014
11	Mr Colin Pratt, Secretary, Department of Education, Tasmania Government	7 February 2014
12	Dr Ian Lillico	7 February 2014
13	Ms Donna Barry	10 February 2014
14	Victorian Principals Association	11 February 2014
15	The Dyslexia and L D Network-Bayside	12 February 2014
16	Rowville Secondary College Council	13 February 2014
17	Ms Ashleigh Petrie	14 February 2014
18	Waverley Christian College, Wantirna South Campus Primary	14 February 2014
19	Ms Yvonne Kelley and Mr Michael Barr	14 February 2014
20	Victorian Catholic Schools Parent Body	14 February 2014
21	Whittlesea Community Connections	14 February 2014

22	Centre for Multicultural Youth	14 February 2014
23	Victorian Student Representative Council	14 February 2014
24	Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network	14 February 2014
25	Parents Victoria	14 February 2014
26	Hopetoun P12 College Council	14 February 2014
27	Bendigo Senior Secondary College	14 February 2014
28	SafeGov	15 February 2014
29	Ms Lynn Wakefield	16 February 2014
30	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch	18 February 2014
31	The Mathematical Association of Victoria	21 February 2014
32	Victorian Association of Catholic Primary School Principals	24 February 2014

Appendix B – List of Witnesses at Public Hearings

Melbourne, 28 April 2014

Name	Position	Organisation
Professor Mike Horsley	Co-author of 'Reforming Homework'	Central Queensland University
Associate Professor Richard Walker	Co-author of 'Reforming Homework'	University of Sydney
Mr Chris Thompson	Director Priority Projects Branch	Department Of Education and Early Childhood Development
Ms Victoria Hall	Director Curriculum Implementation and Partnerships	Department Of Education and Early Childhood Development
Ms Rosemary Roberts	Manager Planning and Assessment	Department Of Education and Early Childhood Development
Mr Peter Roberts	Director, School Services	Independent Schools Victoria
Mr Alan Ross	General Manager, National Partnerships	Independent Schools Victoria
Dr Michelle Cotter	Principal Mercy College Coburg	Principals' Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools
Mr Glenn Butler	Deputy President of VPA, Principal of Ormond Primary School	Victorian Principal's Association
Ms Sharon Saitlik	VPA Board Member, Principal of Mont Albert Primary School	Victorian Principal's Association
Ms Gail McHardy	Executive Officer	Parents' Victoria

Melbourne, 29 April 2014

Name	Position	Organisation
Professor John Hattie		Melbourne Graduate School of Education
Ms Krista Seddon	Coordinator	Victorian Student Representative Council
Ron	Lalor Secondary College	Victorian Student Representative Council
Tess	Templestowe College	Victorian Student Representative Council
Mr James Rankin	Vice-President, Primary Sector	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
Mr Justin Bowd	Research Officer	Australian Education Union Victorian Branch
Dr Toni Meath	Principal	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Ms Yvette Arnott	Director of Curriculum	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Eadie	Year 11 student	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Michelle	Year 11 student	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Karen	Year 11 student	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Susan	Year 11 student	MacRobertson Girls' High School
Ms Sue Harrap	Assistant Principal	Nossal High School
Mr Jeremy Ludowyke	Principal	Melbourne High School
Mr Nick Fairlie	Year 12 Coordinator	Melbourne High School
Ms Meredith Fettling	Assistant Principal	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
Mr Simon Pryor	Executive Officer	The Mathematics Association of Victoria
Ms Trish Jelbart	Councillor	The Mathematics Association of Victoria

Melbourne, 30 April 2014

Name	Position	Organisation
Ms Soo-Lin Quek	Manager, Knowledge and Advocacy	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Mr Placid Jayasuriya	Acting coordinator Education Support	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Ms Sarah Nicholson	Acting Manager Sector and Community Partnerships	Centre for Multicultural Youth
Ms Peta Fualau	Team Leader, Settlement Services	Whittlesea Community Connections
Ms Sarah Haintz	Youth Worker	Whittlesea Community Connections
Dr Kathy Landvogt	Social Policy & Research Unit Manager	Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services
Ms Ann Williams		Dyslexia and LD Network and Specific Learning Disabilities Association
Ms Yvonne Kelley		
Mr Michael Barr		

Appendix C – Acronyms

ADD	Attention Deficit Disorder
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
BSSC	Bendigo Senior Secondary College
CMY	Centre for Multicultural Youth
DP	Deliberate Practice
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
LBB	Learning Beyond the Bell
LD	Learning Disability
MMLLEN	Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PISA	Program of International Student Assessment
PSD	Program for Students with Disabilities
TIMMS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
VCSPB	Parent Body
VicSRC	Victorian Student Representative Council
VIT	Victorian Institute of Teaching
WCC	Whittlesea Community Connections

Appendix D – Glossary

Attention Deficit Disorder	A syndrome, usually diagnosed in childhood, characterized by a persistent pattern of impulsiveness, a short attention span, and often hyperactivity, and interfering especially with academic, occupational, and social performance.
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	<p>A syndrome of disordered behaviour, usually diagnosed in childhood, characterized by a persistent pattern of impulsiveness, inattentiveness, and sometimes hyperactivity that interferes with academic, occupational, or social performance.</p> <p>Although not learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and other disorders are not uncommon among people with LD.</p>
Depression	Children with learning disabilities may be more vulnerable to anxiety and depression than others because processing deficits may make the environment feel overwhelming; Frequent feelings of embarrassment and humiliation in school may introduce depression and anxiety and an underlying biological mechanisms such as brain transmitter dysfunctions or a family history of depression or anxiety can precipitate these issues.
Dyscalculia	Dyscalculia refers to a wide range of lifelong learning disabilities involving math.
Dyslexia	This language processing disorder can hinder reading, writing, spelling and sometimes even speaking.
Dyspraxia	Dyspraxia, a disorder that affects motor skill development, often coexists with learning disabilities.
Epilepsy	A neurological disorder that is primarily noted for producing seizures. It is not uncommon for persons with epilepsy to also experience some degree of cognitive dysfunction.
Extracurricular	Those activities that fall outside the realm of the normal curriculum of school or university education, performed by students.
Flipped Learning	Lectures or other means of direct instruction are moved out of the classroom. Work that is traditionally done in class is completed at home, and the work that is traditionally done as homework is completed in class.
High Functioning	Individuals with HFA or Asperger syndrome exhibit deficits in areas of communication, emotion recognition and expression, and social

Autism	interaction.
Inclusive Classrooms	Rejects the use of special schools or classrooms to separate students with disabilities from students without disabilities. Students with special needs spend most or all of their time with non-disabled students.
Learning Disability	A condition in which a person is reading, writing and/or arithmetic skills are significantly weaker than expected based on their intellectual ability.
Select Entry	Selective entry high schools provide an educationally enriched environment for high achieving, academically gifted students. A centralised selection process is used to admit students to the four selective entry schools. Each year students need to sit a common entrance exam in order to be considered for the following school year.
Scaffolding	Providing students with support in the form of a quiet study space to do homework and a generally conducive and supportive environment.
Shadow Education	The use of private tutors to gain a competitive advantage rather than to deal with an issue of remediation.

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Extract from the Proceedings

The Committee divided on the following question during consideration of this Report, with the result of the divisions detailed below. Questions agreed to without division are not recorded in these extracts.

“That Chapter 6 be adopted by the Committee”

Moved Ms Millar

Seconded Mr Crisp

The Committee Divided.

Ayes

Mrs Jan Kronberg MLC

Mr Peter Crisp MP

Ms Amanda Millar MLC

Noes

Mr Colin Brooks MP

Motion carried.

Minority Report

The inquiry into the approaches to homework in Victorian schools was conducted with a high degree of cooperation between all members of the committee and was ably assisted and supported by the executive team. The full report, as adopted, draws on evidence from a wide range of experts, academics, educators and students and provides an excellent overview and analysis of the global debate about the merit of homework, available research, current policies and practices and some of the factors that can affect homework. As such this minority report has been written to supplement the majority report rather than to replace it or to provide an alternate point of view.

A notable omission from the majority report is the evidence received from a number of stakeholders that the removal of certain forms of financial assistance from disadvantaged families would make it more difficult for children from those families to complete homework tasks and increase the risk of exclusion and disengagement. A majority of committee members decided that this evidence and further examination of it should not be included in the final report. As such, this minority report has been included to highlight this important issue and ensure that all matters raised with the committee are properly canvassed for the consideration of Members and the wider community.

As documented in the majority report in section 4.2.2, “technology is increasingly becoming an element in both school and homework” and that according to research “web-based homework will progressively increase across all year levels”. Put simply, students are increasingly expected to have access to technology to complete homework tasks.

As a number of organisations submitted to the committee, this creates real inequities for students whose families cannot afford the access to technology that is required. Again, the majority report notes “A lack of technology in the home can hamper the ability of students to complete their homework and also participate in class discussion the following day.” A student who gave evidence to the committee cited an example of one of her classmates feeling excluded for this very reason.

Both the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service and the Centre for Multicultural Youth highlighted these pressures on students from low-income families and raised specific concerns about the removal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and other assistance payments from these families. The EMA is financial assistance in the form of payments (in 2014) of \$150 for each primary school student (\$200 for Prep students) and \$250 for each secondary school student (\$300 for Year 7 students). The Napthine Government has abolished this payment for the 2015 school year onwards. The EMA payments for these students had already been reduced by the Government in 2012.

The School Start Bonus of \$300 for students starting primary and secondary school was also abolished by the Napthine Government in 2013. Submissions to the committee also highlighted the Federal Government’s compounding decision to cease the SchoolKids Bonus.

The concerns raised by Good Shepherd Youth and Family Service and the Centre for Multicultural Youth essentially relate to the ability of low-income families to provide access to technology for their children to participate in homework – when the Government has removed the very financial assistance that is designed to help them do this. The authors of this minority report share these concerns.

It is unacceptable that the Government through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, does not appear to have analysed the impact of the removal of the payments mentioned above to assess how low-income families will be affected.

It is clear from the evidence presented to the committee that students increasingly require access to technology at home to fully participate in homework tasks and that the cost of technology can be a barrier for low-income families. The removal of more than \$63 million in EMA funding and \$14.8 million School Start Bonus funding¹ to assist families in this situation carries a very real risk of increasing student exclusion and disengagement. For this reason, it is suggested that the Government should urgently review the impact of these decisions and consider providing a specific financial support package to low-income families to meet basic education costs such as access to technology.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Victorian Government urgently assess the impact of the removal of the Educational Maintenance Allowance and the School Start Bonus on students from low-income families and investigate options to replace the EMA with a “participation package” that specifically supports the provision of access to technology for children’s education.

Colin Brooks MP

Nazih Elasmar MLC