
Synthesis

Homework (Primary)ⁱ

Low impact for very low cost, based on limited evidence



+2

Homework refers to tasks given to pupils by their teachers to be completed outside of usual lessons. Common homework activities in primary schools tend to be reading or practising spelling and number facts, but may also include more extended activities to develop inquiry skills or more directed and focused work such as revision for tests.

How effective is it?

It is certainly the case that schools whose pupils do homework tend to be more successful. However it is not clear whether use of homework is a reason for this success. A number of reviews and meta-analyses have explored this issue. There is stronger evidence that it is helpful at secondary level [see Homework (secondary)], but there is much less evidence of benefit at primary level.

There is some evidence that when homework is used as a short and focused intervention it can be effective in improving students' attainment, but this is limited for primary age pupils. Overall the general benefits are likely to be modest if homework is more routinely set.

The quality of the task set appears to be more important than the quantity of work required from the pupil.

How secure is the evidence?

Homework has been extensively researched. There is a relatively consistent picture that pupils in schools which give more homework perform better, although for primary age pupils the difference is small. However, there are only a small number of studies which have investigated whether this relationship is due to the homework itself, rather than other school factors. These studies compare classes where homework is introduced to similar classes where homework is not given. They tend to

show that homework can be beneficial, but this finding is less secure than the first, because of the smaller number of studies and the quality of the evidence.

What are the costs?

There are few costs associated with homework, though there are implications for staff time for preparation and marking. With younger children there may be additional resources required (such as reading books or games for children to take home). Overall costs are estimated as very low.

What should I consider?

Before you implement this strategy in your learning environment, consider the following:

1. Overall, homework in primary schools does not appear to lead to large increases in learning.
2. Effective homework is associated with greater parental involvement and support. How will you design homework to encourage Parental engagement?
3. The broader evidence base suggests that short focused tasks or activities which relate directly to what is being taught, and which are built upon in school, are likely to be more effective than regular daily homework.
4. Have you made the purpose of homework clear to children?