San [or] Preca College
Floriana Primary

Homework Assessment for Learning & Assessment of Learning
School Policy

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Saint Thomas Street – Floriana
Tel: 21224177
Effective Homework

Learning at home is an essential part of good education. Regular homework is important as it gives pupils the opportunity to practice at home the tasks covered in class, and helps the pupils work towards improving important skills. It also helps children and young people to become confident and independent in their learning, which will help throughout their time at school and in adult life.

Our School Homework Policy

The best way to ensure that everyone understands what is expected is for our school to have a written homework policy, which should be publicly available on request. Our Homework Policy sets out clearly what the purposes of homework are and includes information regarding:

- developing a home-school partnership
- consolidating and reinforcing skills and understanding
- extending school learning.

In our early years, the focus of homework should be on the important skills of literacy and numeracy. Regular reading at home, especially reading with parents, is to be encouraged.

Older pupils in years 4, 5 and 6 are to be given other tasks such as finding out and preparing information as well as traditional writing tasks. This helps to ease the transfer to secondary schools.
Kindergarten

Kindergarten children will be given home activities as and when the teacher feels it appropriate, remembering that school is not compulsory at this level. However it is strongly recommended that children get home activities at least twice a week. Tasks should not take more than 10 – 15 minutes.

It is very important that children are made aware of the importance of books in their lives. Therefore the kindergarten assistant is to make sure that books feature prominently in the classroom. Class library books are to be taken home and parents are to be prompted to read with their children. Full use of the Rhythm and Rhyme Book is to be made in this regard. These all promote literacy and the kindergarten assistant is to make sure that children get proper handling of visualization of letters and simple words, story sequence, language fluency and development and also memorisation.

Other work to be covered includes

- the Home F1 Activities given to the children as activity cards
- colouring and getting to know the colours
- simple crafts
- counting and simple number games

Children are to be given continuous feedback on the correctness and quality of the work that they produce. Neatness is to be encouraged at all times. Children are to be praised whenever they produce work of good quality.
The Early Years - Years 1, 2 & 3

As we are to ensure that by the end of the first three years of the primary cycle of compulsory educational experience in Malta, all learners will have mastered the required core competences in fulfilment of their potential; by the end of Year 3 we are to make sure that all pupils have reached the expected level. If not we have to seek the provision of intervention to enable all learners to access the full curriculum and become lifelong learners. This implies that the first three years of formal schooling are crucial.

During the first three years of the primary course, it is imperative that all homework tasks reflect the work that is already done in class. Only slight changes are allowed and the work is to be heavily structured and controlled. Only as time goes by it is recommended that children are given tasks which are not controlled and which require some kind of research and own initiative.

Work assigned is to cover all aspects of the curriculum with special emphasis on:

- Numeracy
- Literacy in both Maltese and English
- ICT

Work assigned for home is to be clearly written down in the school diary and the teacher is to make sure that all homework is written down. In year three the teacher is to help the children acquire a sense of self responsibility and they start to write the homework themselves. However the teacher is, once again, responsible that everyone has written the homework in the school diary.

Not more than two written homework assignments are to be given everyday. A daily reading task is to be given as well. Over the weekend the homework load can be slightly increased.

All written homework is to be corrected by the class teacher and no class corrections are allowed at this stage. Pupils are to be given immediate feedback regarding their work and it is imperative that pupils are guided to correct their mistakes. Stars, stickers and little rewards may be given for work of excellent quality and as incentives towards good effort. However teachers are to be careful with this matter as it is undesirable that it becomes a cause of extrinsic motivation.
The Later Years - Years 4, 5 & 6

The last three years in the primary course are crucial to the academic development of the child. All teachers are to make sure that each and every pupil entrusted to their care is given due attention in class and that everyone comes to grips with all new concepts and methods that are taught in class.

Two written homework tasks are to be given every day. Over the weekend three or four written tasks are to be assigned. Needless to say all work is to reflect work that is already done in class, all clearly explained by the teacher.

Due importance is to be given to presentation and neatness. All homework is to be written on the school diary and the teacher is to make sure that everyone has written down the list of duties that are to be carried out at home. Keeping in mind the less able pupils, emphasis is to be given to quality rather than to quantity.

In Year 4, pupils are to be taught how to express their thoughts in writing sentences. Later in the year, they are to be taught how to group their sentences into paragraphs. During year 5 and year 6, composition writing is to be part and parcel of the linguistic development of all the pupils. Compositions are to be assigned in both languages. At least a child is to write two compositions in English and two compositions in Maltese per month. These are to be corrected thoroughly by the class teacher and the pupils are to re-copy them without mistakes once the proper feedback is given. No marks are to be assigned however it is recommended that comments are written.

All work is to be corrected and signed by the teacher. Class correction is only allowed when dealing with controlled exercises; however the teacher is still to check that the work is properly marked by the pupil. The teacher is also to check that the necessary correction was carried out. All work is to be signed as seen by the class teacher.

Every so often, the teacher is to check that concepts are being understood by assigning class tests. Prior to exams, past papers are to be explained and worked in class.

Pupils with IEN

A child has special educational needs if he or she has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him or her. A child has a learning difficulty if he or she
(a) has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age or
(b) has a disability or illness which either prevents or hinders the child from making use of the educational facilities of a kind provided for children of the same age in school.

If a pupil gives cause for concern, the given procedure for Statementing will be set in motion, which occasionally results in resources being provided for the child following a Statement of Special Educational Needs. At all stages, the parents are closely involved and the school will ensure that the pupil joins in all the activities of the school with other children, so far as is reasonably practical and compatible, with the efficient education of the other children in the school and with the efficient use of resources.

Learning Support Assistants are to make sure that the children entrusted to their care get the utmost from the curriculum and from what is being taught in class. This is discussed during the IEP meeting which should be held as early as possible in the scholastic year. Towards the end of the scholastic year, all LSAs are to write a review report in which they state whether the planned targets were reached or not.

A child with IEN is to be assigned homework like the rest of the class, however the tasks are to be modified to meet his or her capabilities. Continuous use of praise is to be made.

The Homework Club

Provided that the FES (Foundation for Educational Services) provides financial support to the school, a homework club is to be promoted in our school. This is to be held twice a week and lasts from 14.30 till 16.00.
Formative Assessment

The Concept of Formative Assessment

While many educators are highly focused on exams and tests, it is important to consider that over the course of a scholastic year, teachers can create many opportunities to assess how students are learning. Then they can use this information to make beneficial changes in their methods of teaching.

This diagnostic use of assessment to provide feedback to both teachers and their students is called formative assessment. It stands in contrast to summative assessment, which generally takes place after a period of instruction and requires making a judgment about the learning that has occurred. Summative assessment is generally put into effect by some kind of grading or scoring in a class based test or in a national exam.

PURPOSE AND BENEFITS OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Assessment broadly includes all activities that teachers and students undertake to get information and that then can be used diagnostically to alter teaching and learning. Under this definition, assessment has to include teacher observation, classroom discussion, and analysis of student work, including homework and tests. Assessment becomes formative when this information is used to adapt teaching and learning in order to meet student needs.

When teachers know how students are progressing and where they are having trouble, they can use this information to make necessary instructional adjustments, such as reteaching, trying alternative instructional approaches, or offering more opportunities for practice. These activities can lead to improved student success.
SOME POINTS ABOUT FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

- Efforts to strengthen formative assessment produce significant learning gains.

- Feedback given as part of formative assessment helps students become aware of any gaps that exist between their desired goal and their current knowledge, understanding, or skill and guides them through actions necessary to obtain the goal.

- The most helpful type of feedback on tests and homework provides specific comments about errors and specific suggestions for improvement and encourages students to focus their attention thoughtfully on the task rather than on simply getting the right answer.

- This type of feedback may be particularly helpful to lower achieving students because it emphasizes that students can improve as a result of effort rather than be doomed to low achievement due to some presumed lack of innate ability.

- Formative assessment helps support the expectation that all children can learn to high levels and counteracts the cycle in which students attribute poor performance to lack of ability and therefore become discouraged and unwilling to invest in further learning.

- While feedback generally originates from the teacher, students can also play an important role in formative assessment through self-evaluation.

EXAMPLES OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The goal of formative assessment is to gain an understanding of what the students know and do not know so as to make responsive changes in teaching and learning.
Teacher observation and classroom discussions, alongside the analysis of tests and homework, are important techniques towards achieving effective and fruitful changes.

Teachers should be encouraged to use questioning and classroom discussion as an opportunity to increase their students’ knowledge and improve understanding. Teachers need to make sure to ask thoughtful, reflective questions rather than simple, factual ones and then give students adequate time to respond. In order to involve everyone, they suggest strategies such as the following:

- Invite students to discuss their thinking about a question or topic in pairs or small groups, then ask a representative to share the thinking with the whole class.
- Present several possible answers to a question, then ask students to vote on them.
- Ask all students to write down an answer then read a selected few out loud.

The 10 Principles

Assessment for learning should be part of effective planning of teaching and learning

A teacher's planning should provide opportunities for both learner and teacher to obtain and use information about progress towards learning goals. It also has to be flexible to respond to initial and emerging ideas and skills. Planning should include strategies to ensure that learners understand the goals they are pursuing and the criteria that will be applied in assessing their work. How learners will receive feedback, how they will take part in assessing their learning and how they will be helped to make further progress should also be planned.

Assessment for learning should focus on how students learn
The process of learning has to be in the minds of both learner and teacher when assessment is planned and when the evidence is interpreted. Learners should become as aware of the 'how' of their learning as they are of the 'what'.

**Assessment for learning should be recognised as central to classroom practice**

Much of what teachers and learners do in classrooms can be described as assessment. That is, tasks and questions prompt learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills. What learners say and do is then observed and interpreted, and judgements are made about how learning can be improved. These assessment processes are an essential part of everyday classroom practice and involve both teachers and learners in reflection, dialogue and decision making.

**Assessment for learning should be regarded as a key professional skill for teachers**

Teachers require the professional knowledge and skills to: plan for assessment; observe learning; analyse and interpret evidence of learning; give feedback to learners and support learners in self-assessment. Teachers should be supported in developing these skills through initial and continuing professional development.

**Assessment for learning should be sensitive and constructive because any assessment has an emotional impact**

Teachers should be aware of the impact that comments, marks and grades can have on learners’ confidence and enthusiasm and should be as constructive as possible in the feedback that they give. Comments that focus on the work rather than the person are more constructive for both learning and motivation.

**Assessment for learning should take account of the importance of learner motivation**

Assessment that encourages learning fosters motivation by emphasising progress and achievement rather than failure. Comparison with others who have been more successful is unlikely to motivate learners. It can also lead to their withdrawing from the learning process in areas where they have been made to feel they are 'no good'.
Motivation can be preserved and enhanced by assessment methods which protect the learner's autonomy, provide some choice and constructive feedback, and create opportunity for self-direction.

**Assessment for learning should promote commitment to learning goals and a shared understanding of the criteria by which they are assessed**

For effective learning to take place learners need to understand what it is they are trying to achieve - and want to achieve it. Understanding and commitment follows when learners have some part in deciding goals and identifying criteria for assessing progress. Communicating assessment criteria involves discussing them with learners using terms that they can understand, providing examples of how the criteria can be met in practice and engaging learners in peer and self-assessment.

**Four Important Components**

- **Ask questions in class:** Many teachers leave less than one second for pupils to answer a question, and elicit answers from a small minority. The teachers have to learn to change this, giving pupils time to think about a question and expecting everyone to respond.

- **Mark homework:** Usually, when given grades or marks, pupils look only at these and ignore suggestions for improvement. So the teachers have to concentrate on giving only comments, on which pupils are expected to take action to improve the work. This shifts attention away from competing for marks and merits, and towards each using the opportunity to produce their best work. I suggest that our school now should have a school-wide policy that no marks or grades are given on homework.

- **Pupils assessing one another:** Pupil groups can mark each others work, and thereby learn to think about the aim of a piece of work and to understand the criteria of quality. This makes teachers realise how much potential there is in a group work session for individuals to have that much-needed discussion about where they go wrong each time.
Involve pupils in their tests: Pupils usually see tests as the last judgment. By involving pupils in setting test questions, in inventing mark schemes, and in marking one another’s answers, teachers help pupils to achieve a different view: “They feel that the pressure to succeed in tests is being replaced by the need to understand the work that has been covered and the test is just an assessment along the way of what needs more work and what seems to be fine.”

These four components add up to a powerful overall effect on transforming teaching. One teacher expressed his initial problem as “Who is doing the thinking?” He was doing too much of it, the pupils too little. He saw the overall effect of the changes on his pupils as follows “Some of their comments show that they are starting to value the learning process more highly.”

Some Helpful Tips

Focus on pupil support and encouragement:

- Show enthusiasm: have fun celebrating achievements!
- Be positive: notice effort and see any carelessness as a slip of the moment, not a sign of future failure.
- Accept and understand: listen to their difficulties and accept these as real for them.
- Boost their self-belief: when they have a task to do, say something encouraging and leave them to get on with it. Hovering too close by may suggest that you think they’ll need your help.
- Be interested, but ask open-ended rather than specific questions.

Increase your pupils’ sense of control:
o Wherever possible, allow children to work to their goals, rewards and time scale, not yours.

o Don’t jump in too quickly: give them time to spot their own mistakes.

o Help by offering a range of possible solutions, rather than telling them what’s right or what to do. Accept that they will have different ways of seeing and doing things.

o Offer some choices, when possible, about when they do things and where they prefer to work.

o If they run out of time to complete something, avoid finishing it for them.
Summative Assessment

The impact of summative assessment and tests on students’ motivation for learning.

Some Points

- When tests in mixed ability classes are held, low-achieving pupils have lower self-esteem than higher-achieving pupils, whilst when no tests are held there is no correlation between self-esteem and achievement. Thus repeated practice tests reinforce the low self-image of the lower-achieving students.

- When passing tests is highly important, such as in year six, teachers adopt a teaching style which emphasises transmission teaching of knowledge, thereby favouring those students who prefer to learn in this way and disadvantaging and lowering the self-esteem of those who prefer more active and creative learning experiences.

- Tests can influence teachers' classroom assessment which may be interpreted by students as purely summative, regardless of the teacher's intentions, possibly as a result of teachers' over-concern with performance rather than process. Highly important assessments can create a classroom climate in which transmission teaching and highly structured activities predominate and which favour only those students with certain learning dispositions.

- Students are aware of a performance ethos in the classroom and that the tests give only a narrow view of what they can do.

- Students dislike exams and tests. Some of them show high levels of test anxiety (particularly girls) and prefer other forms of assessment.

- Teachers have a key role in supporting students to put effort into their learning activities.
Feedback on assessments has an important role in determining further learning. Students are influenced by feedback from earlier performance on similar tasks in relation to the effort they invest in further tasks.

Teacher feedback that is ego-involving rather than task-involving can influence the effort students put into further learning and their orientation towards performance rather than learning goals.

Tests and exams can become the rationale for all that is done in classrooms, permeating teacher-initiated assessment interactions.

Teacher collegiality is important in creating an assessment ethos that supports students' feelings of self-efficacy and effort.

An education system that puts great emphasis on evaluation produces students with strong extrinsic orientation towards grades and social status.

OUR SCHOOL SYSTEM

The Early Years

Teachers in Years 1, 2 and 3 are encouraged to engage their pupils in simple exercises with the aim of getting to know whether their pupils are getting to grips with the concepts and the techniques that are taught in class. These check points are to be purely formative in nature. No marks are to be given and comments are to be written with the sole intention of helping and encouraging the child along. No depreciative comments are to be used. No formal testing is to be carried out during the first three years of the primary school.

The Later Years

Teachers in Years 4, 5 and 6 are expected to engage their pupils in structured monthly check lists and exercises with the aim of getting to know whether their pupils are getting to grips with the concepts and the techniques that are taught in class. Once
again these check points are to be purely formative in nature. It is advised that no marks are given and comments are to be written with the sole intention of helping and encouraging the child along. No depreciative comments are to be used. Class assignments are to be given on a regular basis and all work is to be corrected within a short time span. Feedback is to be given in all aspects.

**Examinations**

The Half Yearly Examinations for Year 4 and Year 5 Students and the Annual Examinations for Year 6 are to be used in both a formative and a summative manner. Class teachers are encouraged to discuss the students’ performance with the parents during Parents’ Day and with the students themselves.

However, teachers are to refrain from divulging examination results to anybody before the results are formally given to the parents on Parents’ Day. Failure to do this is considered to be highly unprofessional and unethical. It is strictly understood that examination scripts are to remain always at school and under no circumstances are they to be given to the students or the parents to be taken home.

The Annual Examinations for Year 4 and Year 5, unfortunately, cannot be used as a tool for learning and their outcome is purely summative. The purpose of these exams in our school is neither considered as one useful to the classification exercise nor as one useful for promotion. It is not the policy to make students repeat any class. Annual Examination results in this case are to be sent home by post on the last day of the scholastic year.