

## **HOMEWORK: COMMENTS & CONCERNS**

We would like to take this opportunity to thank parents and carers for completing the questionnaires distributed at the parents' evenings. Your comments have been positive, incisive and constructive. We are now in the process of researching homework practices in order to review the homework policy in place at The Grey Coat Hospital.

A number of questions which featured in the questionnaire were specific to this project and a summary of our findings is recorded below and a shorter version of the report is included in our June newsletter. Further discussions will be taking place with pupils and teachers in response to your comments and recommendations.

In light of the feedback, we have found that parents agree that their daughters are organised with homework; 89% of all parents supported this statement. Year 10 students were deemed to be most organised in this respect, closely followed by Year 7 and Year 8. There was however a decline in numbers amongst the Year 9 cohort and it raises the question as to whether this phenomenon is specific to the make up of the cohort, or a Year 9 phase or a just passing fad?

In terms of challenge provided in homework, both Year 11 and Year 12 concurred that homework is more demanding this year than last year. This could be owing to the fact that these year groups are working towards important public examinations, in which the demands of homework, coursework, research and revision all come to the fore and intensify.

Inversely, all of the years in KS3 reported that homework was less demanding this year, compared to last year. This suggests that we need to consider ways of gauging and providing more challenge, starting from primary school transition to secondary and through to Year 9. At this stage, it is unclear as to whether the homework is less demanding in terms of quantity or complexity. Further discussion with pupils may shed some light on this matter as it is our intention 'to challenge each individual student with appropriate homework' (GCH Homework Policy 2000).

As stated in the current homework policy, one of the aims of homework at GCH is 'to develop the pupils' ability to work alone'. In light of questionnaire results, this is largely the case: 94% of parents feel that their sons/daughters work well independently. We will continue to encourage and develop pupil autonomy in homework assignments although we do not underestimate the value of collaborative and interactive homework also.

As regards the volume of homework, almost a quarter of parents (23%) felt that their child was given too little homework. This concern was most audible amongst the parents of Year 9 pupils (40%). One parent concluded: 'Needs more homework'. Clearly, it needs to be determined as to whether the reality is that Year 9 pupils are not doing homework that is set or whether little homework is actually set. On the other hand, we found that 50% of all of those surveyed felt that just the right amount was set and 27% concluded that their daughters were given too much.

Parents almost unanimously agreed on the value of homework, in that it contributes to overall academic achievement. KS3 – 94%, KS4 – 93%, KS5 – 93%. As detailed, in our current homework policy, ‘over a five year period regular homework would be equivalent to an extra year's education with consequent benefits’.

For those who did not agree on the value of homework, points were raised about the importance of physical exercise, the need for extra curricular activities and the time for social interaction which can be overlooked owing to homework obligations. ‘I think that they have too much homework and not enough time for PE or exercise after school’ and another parent wrote sensitively about excessive homework being ‘detrimental to her [daughter’s] learning and life’.

At Grey Coat we believe that parental support is vital in seeing that homework is done conscientiously and in the best possible conditions. The questionnaire found that 80% of parents across the year groups confirmed that they reviewed their child’s homework. Year 7 parents were the most diligent in checking on homework. There was then a gradual and systematic decrease in numbers for Years 8, 9 and 10 followed by a sharp increase of parental checking in Year 11. One parent relayed how, despite his/her efforts to check on homework ‘my daughter rarely gives me a chance to look at her piece of homework’ whereas another parent felt that the need to monitor was minimal when motivation was maximum, ‘I don’t feel it is essential to monitor my daughter’s homework at regular intervals as she is motivated, meticulous and trustworthy’.

A key micro skill associated with homework is the ability ‘to develop the skills of researching’. This skill is reported by parents to be strongest in key stage 3 (92%) but nevertheless comparable to key stage 4 (87%). All the same it needs to be questioned why pupils from lower school appear have a slight upper hand in this area, when it would be expected that this skill would improve with experience. One parent raised a concern that ‘research depends on internet too much’ which highlights the importance of exploring a range of sources and not just exploring the research engine.

Pupils’ efforts in homework provide a personal sense of progress and achievement. We feel that it is important that this success is also recognised and rewarded by classmates and by the teacher/tutor. A high percentage of parents of Year 7 students (97%) agreed that their daughter’s homework is rewarded and recognised. Similarly a large proportion of Year 8 students’ parents supported this view (93%). The figures then decreased year on year until an all time low of 66% for Year 11 and a parent commented: ‘In lower school merits were recognition of good work, this seems to have lessened in upper school despite my daughter’s standard of work being maintained.’ A discussion with senior year groups about the reward system will be useful in this respect.

There are a plethora of issues and initiatives which have been raised from this project and we would like to thank you for your time and thought. Should you have any further comments or recommendations, please do share them with us in writing or by emailing [admin@gch.org.uk](mailto:admin@gch.org.uk) entitling your message ‘Homework Research Project’

*‘We are delighted with the school. Our daughter has grown in confidence and self esteem and is consistently encouraged by her teachers.’ (Year 10 Parent)*