

Addressing Poverty Through Action on Homework

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Introduction

Depending on how homework is assigned and assessed, homework can arguably either be a useful marker towards academic achievement or a negative influence on children's well-being (Cooper, Robinson, and Patall, 2006 & Negru and Sava, 2023).

To prevent and address homework issues related to income inequality, it is important that schools consider pupils' resources, promote flexible and non-punitive approaches to homework incompleteness, and ensure students do not miss out due to difficulties in making assignments.

In the Poverty Proofing© the School Day Bradford sample by Children North East, they raised several points that need further work within this area.



In **30%** of schools, homework **requires additional resources at home** - *'In History we had to make a castle, we had to use toilet rolls. Not many people did it - they couldn't be bothered, or they didn't have the materials at home.'* (pupil)

In **23%** of schools, there was **no in-school provision to complete homework** - *'You aren't allowed to take any of the iPads home with you.'* (pupil)

In **38%** of schools, you pupils receive **sanction for not completing homework** - *'You have to lose your break and finish it. You can go out when it's finished.'* (pupil)

Use this document to consider how policies and procedures around homework affect students in your school with an income inequality lens.

Questions To Ask Your School

Question	Page
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are your homework assignments inclusive to students who may or may not have digital or financial resources? • Do you standardise giving students all needed resources for projects and assignments, so students and parents do not feel they must supplement or buy materials? 	3
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do students suffer socially, fall behind, or face punitive actions for not completing their homework? • Are there sufficient alternatives when parents cannot sign reading diaries (or similar) so students do not lose out on rewards or positive acknowledgment? 	5



Addressing Digital and Physical Resources Constraints

What Citizens Say



'All the homework is online.' (pupil)

'My teacher can give you everything that you need, in class and at home.' (pupil)

'We aren't asked to make stuff at home. We do that in school with the stuff school provide.' (pupil)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Students are required to complete homework that **requires online access or digital technology**, which they may not have.

For project-based tasks and models, students **may not have the resources** to complete these tasks at home or **cannot afford to purchase supplement materials** like other students.

Guidance

- As standard, **provide paper copies** of homework tasks so students do not have to request it.
- Create a **hybrid approach** as necessary to ensure offline learning is valued or homework is entirely done offline.
- Where it is not possible to eliminate digital programs, **allow children to access IT facilities during school** and **loan devices** for at-home use.
- Sign up to the **Good Things Foundation** to support families with device access.
- Visit the **Living Well Schools** website to learn more about tackling the digital divide, or ask your Living Well School lead.

- **Provide all materials needed** for assignments so students use the same materials.
- No added pressure put on families to purchase materials.



Case Studies

Bradford Schools



Some Bradford schools continued providing students IT resources after the pandemic, either by **loan or allowing them to keep devices** given during lockdown.

'We've been able to keep them.' (pupil); *'You can do Sumdog on the school's iPads.'* (pupil).

Other schools have structured their homework to be **hybrid** – either online or on paper with **no discrimination between the two modes**.

Multiple schools structured project-based assignments, such as making models of volcanos, to be fully **completed at school**, with **materials provided** to students.

'There is all the materials at the back of class so you just take what you need.' (pupil)

'We bring in all the equipment ourselves and provide it to the children to make models in class.' (staff)



Supporting Pupils

What Citizens Say



'You have to lose your break and finish it. You can go out when it's finished.' (pupil)

'When you get your reading signed you can put a tick on the Raving Readers chart. If you get 25 ticks, then you get a prize.' (pupil)

'As long as children are reading the books provided by school we are happy.' (staff)

What Your School Can Do?

Barriers

Due to working hours or other pressures, **parents are not always available to listen to their children read** or sign reading diaries.

When students do not complete their reading, **markers for progress can be missed**.

Penalties for not completing homework, **with social ramifications**, including missing breaks and lunch times to complete assignments. Students miss out on rewards, and peers know when they do not complete their work, making them worried about future homework assignments.

Struggles with homework completion can mean **students go without key learning**.

Guidance

- **Create flexible policies** allowing students to sign their own reading diaries **at all year levels**.
- Staff can **create opportunities for students** to read to them, checking that markers are met.
- **Community volunteers** could provide support with in-school reading sessions.

- Ensure that homework completion policies **are not punitive but supportive to students**.
- Standardise policies across years where possible.
- Consider ways to support students **without them losing out on valuable social time and physical activity** during breaks.
- Consider how **rewards systems are formatted**, designing them **so students do not miss out** based on homework completion difficulties, nor feel social pressures from rewards being publicised.

- Ensure homework tasks do not cover new materials so **students do not fall behind**.



Barriers

Some pupils **do not have adequate, quiet home spaces** to complete homework.

'My teacher said I just needed to concentrate harder if it's noisy at home but I can't always do that.' (pupil)

'I don't have anywhere quiet and have to do it on my bed.' (pupil)

Guidance

- Increase **staff awareness** about how a quiet space may not be available for students and plan around this.
- Create **in-school opportunities or programs** where students can complete assignments at school, such as homework clubs.
- Have an **empathic approach** to why homework has not been completed: *'We understand that children can sometimes struggle to work at home; the work we give is nearly always recapping work done in school, so no child falls behind.'* (staff)

Case Studies

Bradford
Schools



In multiple schools, **staff will listen to students read** so that **reading markers aren't missed** and students are able to receive rewards.

'You don't get into trouble if you don't read at home.' (pupil)

One school's reading reward structure was based on the number of books read rather than based reading frequency, using quizzes at the end of books to check for understanding. This **reduces parental or caregiver burden**.

One school does not have a 'take home ted', **reducing pressure on families and students** to do additional weekend or holiday activities. This reduces time burdens and students do not feel compared to others if this proves difficult to achieve.



References

Cooper, H, Robinson, J, & Patall, E (2006). Does Homework Improve Academic Achievement? A Synthesis of Research. *Review of Educational Research* 76: 1–62.
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