



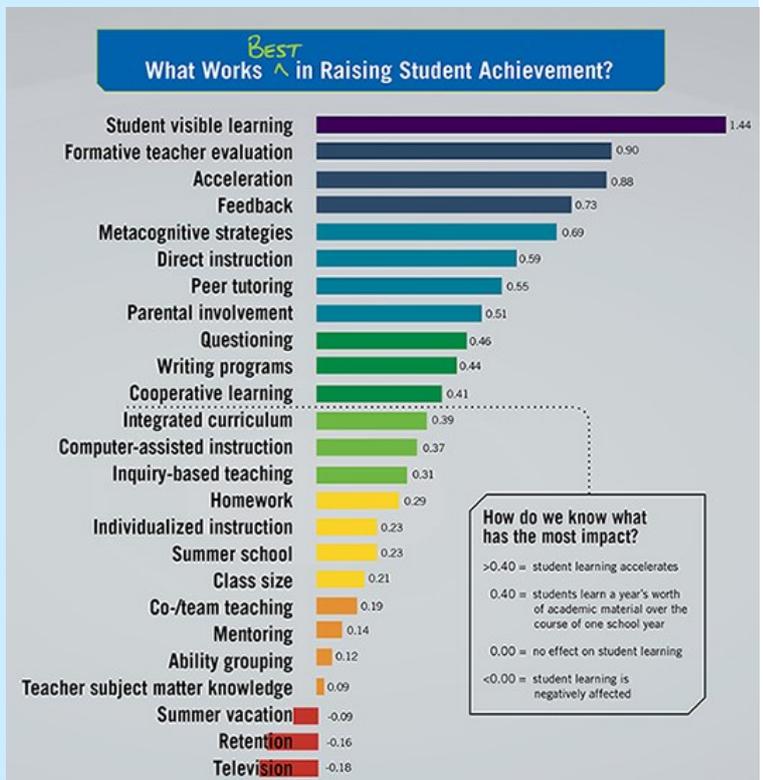
Ridgeway *Digest*

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Home Learning

As a school, we aim to have an approach to learning that is embedded in research to ensure we are providing children with the best education for their long-term success. In 2017, a review of research about home learning, alongside senior staff attending a training course, prompted a re-evaluation of our approach. This coincided with feedback from parents about how challenging they were finding completing the home learning tasks set, especially those parents with multiple children in the school. Our previous approach was for children to complete a weekly (fortnightly in KS1) project-based activity, which almost always required some sort of end product (e.g. a PowerPoint, booklet, factsheet, poster, model, etc). The topics for the weekly projects might have fed into future learning being covered in class (e.g. exploring the buoyancy of objects at home before learning about buoyancy in class), but they usually stemmed from class learning. For example, children might create a poster about Victorian schools following their studies of this topic in class. Consolidating learning in this way seemed like an exciting and valid way to give children some choice and flexibility, and to encourage them to learn at home: or so we thought.

World-renowned education researcher **Professor John Hattie** conducts detailed meta-analyses of research from across the globe and calculates the impact of a wide range of factors that can influence children's progress, both positively and negatively. Each factor is given a positive or negative value, with 0.0 representing no impact. Hattie found that the average effect size of all the interventions he studied was 0.40 - he refers to this as the "hinge point" (i.e. initiatives or factors that have an effect greater than this can be said to be having a 'greater than average influence' on achievement). He found that home learning in primary schools has a negligible effect (0.01) on children's progress, while home learning in secondary schools has a more positive effect (0.54). As home learning in primary schools has no effect, it might be natural to conclude: 'Why bother?' Hattie himself points out that home learning is an important way for parents to be, and to feel, involved in supporting their child, so advocates doing *something*. But if the effect is limited, what is the best thing to do? Interestingly, and in contrast to our previous understanding, Hattie's research also indicated that project-based home learning was the least effective for primary aged children, but that revision of information had *some* positive impact. This got us thinking of ways we could

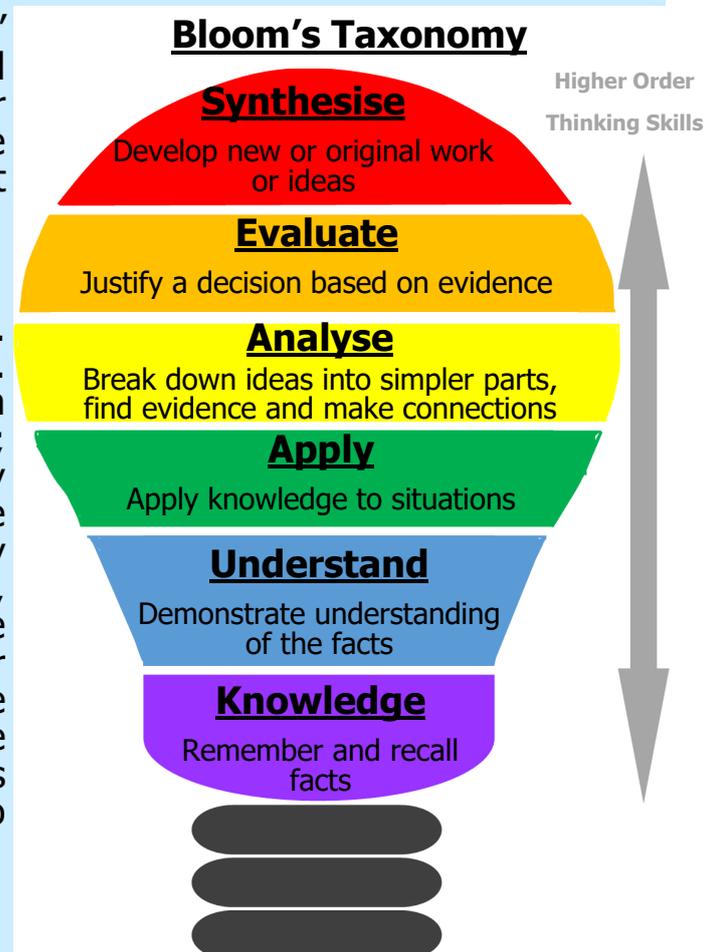


combine some traditional 'rehearsal' activities for knowledge best known off by heart (e.g. learning number facts, times tables and spellings) with a more progressive approach to home learning based on curriculum topics.

In addition to reviewing this research, two of the school's leadership team attended a training course led by **James Nottingham**, who is the founder of 'Challenging Learning' and has a passion for transforming the most up-to-date research into strategies that really work in the classroom. He advocates an approach to home learning called 'Preview', which we have now adopted as the basis for our '**Pre-learn**' or '**Pre-think**' home learning activities. Applying Hattie's scale, Nottingham's research shows that this style of home learning has an effect of 0.9, making it very effective as an approach. 'Pre-learn' involves children exploring a topic or content at home, in advance of exploring it in school. In reference back to the example of home learning about Victorian schools, instead of rehearsing learning from class, children will find out about Victorian schools at home and come to class equipped with new knowledge. The benefits of this approach are:

- Children gain prior knowledge and therefore have a head start, or advantage, the next week in class.
- Children are more engaged with and motivated by their learning.
- There is greater scope for personalisation and choice (because their opportunities to explore and pre-learn are open) which can be factored into the classroom learning, empowering and motivating pupils.
- In class, teachers can take the learning deeper and in more interesting and creative directions, factoring in the children's ideas where possible.
- Learning conversations are richer, as children are more informed.
- A broader set of skills can be developed (see the image below), as the simpler task of knowledge acquisition is already done.
- As suggested ways to explore the topic are quite open, parents can be more positively engaged in the home learning process.

According to Nottingham, the 'Preview' approach enables more rapid and focused development of children's higher order thinking skills (such as those outlined in the image opposite). Nottingham points out that in the modern world, knowledge acquisition is easy; digital and online technology enables us to find and retrieve information in a matter of seconds, from almost any location. The challenge is knowing what to do with it. We are preparing children for an unknown future: the jobs they do might not yet exist; technology develops so rapidly that the way we do things is constantly evolving; and the world faces challenges we cannot yet fully foresee, appreciate or plan for. Therefore, children's ability to apply, analyse, evaluate and create information (i.e. developing higher order thinking skills) is critical to their future success. If this long-term vision of their future seems distant and not yet relevant, it is important to know that these skills will also help them succeed in school.



Since adopting this approach to home learning, teachers report that the discussions in class are richer and more varied than before. Children are helping shape the learning and bringing new and interesting topics into the classroom for discussion. They are talking more confidently and articulately about topics, which promotes greater engagement.

Assessment of home learning is carried out through the regular discussions that take place in class around the topics being studied: teachers use formative assessment to ask questions and give feedback to pupils which can be acted upon immediately. Due to the open and varied directions that home learning can take, various methods of assessment can be used by teachers in class, which adds to the richness of the learning, as well as the children's experience and development. Although with this approach there is no formal requirement to produce an end product, children can choose to record their findings to aid the recall of the new knowledge in class. Those children who do not complete their home learning will be unable to engage with these class discussions and therefore will need to acquire the new knowledge first, which acts as an incentive to do the pre-learning at home.

Finally, let's return to 'rehearsal-style' home learning. Parents have indicated a desire to know how to support their children on a daily basis. Alongside the Pre-learn tasks, children can, and should, be supported with other daily activities to strengthen their learning development. Daily **reading** will help them develop their fluency and comprehension skills as well as a love for books. Daily repetition of the **spellings** sent home will enable pupils to recall them more readily. Given the inconsistency of the English language (i.e. there are many words that do not adhere to spelling patterns or which are not spelled the way they sound), learning spellings is crucial. In addition, children are more numerate and able to tackle the whole Maths curriculum when they know **maths facts**, such as number bonds and times tables. Daily rehearsal of these helps the facts become 'known'. When the time that could be spent completing learning at home over the course of a week is added up, there is actually a lot that parents can do to support their children. Let's also not overlook the benefits (to health, emotional and mental well-being and academic development) of a variety of other activities, including: family trips, playing games (inside and out), regular exercise and social clubs, to name a few.