RedhillTSA research

Does the introduction of an online homework system across the school improve communication and students' organisation of homework

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The Redhill Academy has recently introduced an online system called Show My Homework. Teachers add homework tasks to the system and students (and their parents) can view their homework online and download any relevant files. Various other features are also available for teachers to use. The school hopes that this online system will improve communication of homework tasks and improve students' completion of homework.

In the first few weeks, a number of staff were very positive about the system and so in this research I wanted to find out students' opinions to see if our approach could be improved in any way.
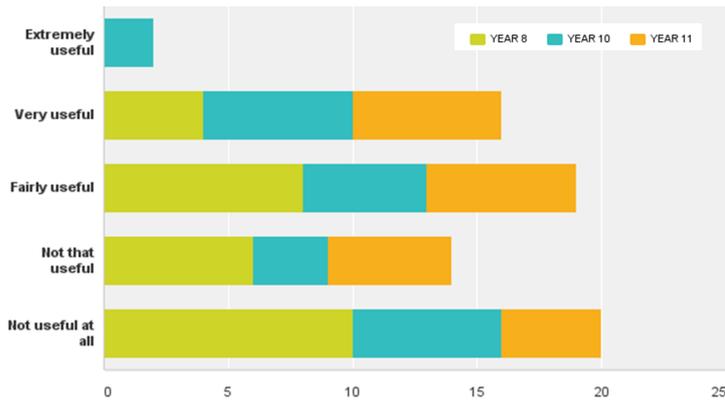
We used an online survey tool to ask a chosen sample questions about what they found useful about the system, any effects on their organisation with homework tasks and specifics about where and how they accessed the website. The sample is made up nearly 80 students across Year 8, 10 and 11.

There are two questions that this research is hoping to investigate:

- **How does Show My Homework improve communication about homework between teachers and students?**

- **How does using Show My Homework improve students' organisation of homework?**

Usefulness to students

When asked how useful they had found the new system it was disappointing to find that their opinions were very mixed. However, when they were asked to explain this further, a clear division was apparent between students based on the relationship between the Show My Homework system and their planners (which are essentially homework diaries). When the system was introduced we had assumed that students would see it as a complement to their planners; some students clearly felt this to be the case and appreciated the extra information and access to resources that the system gave. However, a significant portion of the students we sampled clearly felt that they served exactly the same purpose and favoured one over the other, choosing to continue with their planners only, the method they were used to.

Below is a small selection of the explanations students gave but these are fairly typical of the responses we got from all students.

Students who said it was extremely/very useful:

"Sometimes I forget to write it down in my planner so I look on this"

"If you haven't written the homework in full detail in your planner you can check on Show My Homework."

"Because i can get the app on my phone and check my homework at home"

"Easier to keep track of homework"

vs.

Students who said it was not that useful:

"I've already recorded my homework in my planner and check back at that rather than going on the website."

"We have our planners and if someone loses their planner they can ask the teacher or a friend."

"I find it easier to look in my planner"

"Already get homework sheets in class."

"…teachers give you the homework sheet anyway and I'm organised enough to not lose it."

Clearly, there is a need to use and promote the aspects of the system that will complement the planner and provide extra support and information.

Organisation

We asked students if the system had helped with their organisation in relation to homework tasks. Whilst the negative responses echoed those quoted earlier regarding the planner, the positive responses highlighted some key areas that we could easily promote to all students:

Time management

"Yes, because it shows you when you need to hand it in and what day it was set "

"Yes because I can see which pieces of homework need doing first."

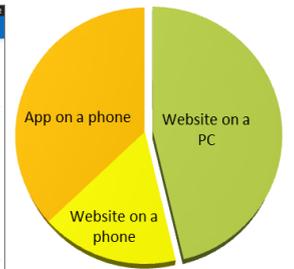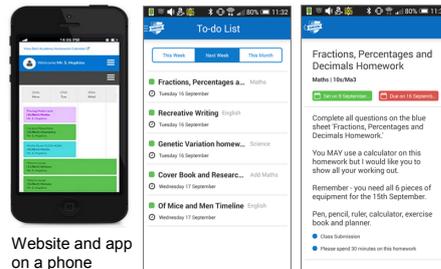"I do more homework on the night I get it now."

Information

"Yes because there is more information about the homework set"

"If I didn't understand the work I could look at Show My Homework and read it again."

"It explains a homework task to me"

Use of planner

"Yes because I understand it more, because the teacher has written it"

"Yes because it splits things up in more detail than it all being messy in your planner"

How students look at the Show My Homework system

It was anticipated that the app would be popular with students and our findings back this up. The website is designed to be viewed just as well on a phone as on a PC and the app is designed to show homework tasks as a personal to-do list with a clear display of the information and resources with each task.

Website and app on a phone

Conclusions

Clearly, our initial experience of using Show My Homework shows that there is a lot of potential. However, to fully engage with all of our students we need to look at ways in which their use of the system can complement and extend their planner.

It is suggested that we do the following:

- Add detail to our homework task descriptions
- Upload files either as backups or to complement tasks
- Add links to useful websites, e.g. help with the task
- Continue to encourage staff to explore the available features, such as Gradebook that have the potential to make this a really valuable tool for staff, as well as the students**.**

Chris West, Assistant Headteacher, The Redhill Academy ✉ c.west@theredhillacademy.org.uk

Redhill Teaching School Alliance