

Whose job is it to teach kids – teachers or parents?

A recent letter from a Zhejiang primary school has prompted heated debate on social media.

The row centers on the extent to which parents should get involved in their children's education.

The letter from the school was titled, 'Allowing parents to bid farewell to homework checking,' a phenomenon particularly popular in Chinese. "Checking homework is the basic responsibility of each teacher, while parents have their own business to worry about," the letter goes on.

Naturally all parents want the best for their child. China's one-child policy, which has only recently been relaxed in the last few years, made educating your only child even more of an obsession.

Teachers too want children to succeed. That's their job after all.

Recent years have seen the growth in what's sometimes called 'Parental Homework,' where teachers have encouraged mothers and fathers to correct homework on their behalf, and guide their children's study, piling yet more concern on already busy parents.

A recent survey of 2001 parents (71.5% of which had young children or were parents of primary school students) showed that 81.8% were lumbered with 'parental homework.' A call for an end to checking and signing off on children's homework was supported by 79.3% of those questioned.

The practice of signing their names in exercise books as a way to prove that they had joined in their children's study process, surfaced in the last 10 years. The original intention was to create more opportunities for parents to interact with their children. However, simply signing their names soon expanded into the expectation that they had to correct the homework instead of the teachers.

However, if the onus of teaching children is shifted back onto schools, what then should be the role of parents? According to the survey, the majority believe the main responsibility of parents is to shape their child's personality and character. Teachers, they believe, should stick to teaching, and rely less on parents.

Some are concerned however that a move away from the 'parental homework' phenomenon, might mean parents being 'absent' from their child's education.

Professor Tang from Suzhou University said, schools can't shirk their duties regardless of how closely they co-operate with parents. Parents should act as watch-dogs. People should avoid extremes and find a balance.