



Independent Learning Policy

At Isaac Newton Academy our aim is to equip every student with the knowledge, learning power and character necessary for success at university and beyond. Supporting students through a comprehensive and effective independent learning programme

- provides students with opportunities to refine and extend their knowledge, skills and BRIDGES characteristics
- helps them to acquire the habits of mind needed to study and learn independently (as required in higher education)
- increases students' chances of securing top examination grades (research suggests that the more independent learning a student does, the better their achievement)
- teaches students the benefits of application, self-motivation, initiative and resourcefulness, essential in all walks of life
- enhances the classroom experience for students and teachers.

Effective and routine Independent Learning is essential for ensuring a continuous, positive loop whereby the classroom experience sparks curiosity, leading to independent learning which informs the next lesson. Once the cycle operates seamlessly, students acquire knowledge, learning power and character.

Isaac Newton Academy independent learning tasks are set each week in each subject for all students. An Independent Learning Timetable is publicised with students and parents at the start of each academic year, outlining clearly in which subjects students will be assigned independent learning tasks each day and the expected time that should be spent on each assignment.

In Year 7 students are expected to spend approximately 1-1.5 hours each evening on independent learning activities. Each subject will set one assignment of approximately 30 minutes' duration per week with the exception of Maths and English which will set two (or one 1 hour task). This amounts to either 2 or 3 tasks per school night. In addition, all Year 7 students are expected to read for a minimum of 20 minutes per night, to bring the book that they are currently reading to school each day, and to arrive at each lesson prepared to discuss their reading if asked about it by the teacher or a peer. They are also expected to practise their musical instruments for 15 minutes at least three times per week.

By Year 9, students are set around 2 hours of independent learning per night. The Institute of Education's EPPIE Project (2011) showed that 14 year olds spending 2 hours per evening on such tasks were assessed at almost a whole national curriculum level higher in Maths at the end of key

stage 3 than similar students who were not set homework, 0.75 of a level higher in Science and 0.6 of a level higher in English.

At KS4 students are expected to spend 10-14 hours a week on IL (2 hours each for English, Maths and Science and between 1-2 hours on each of the options subjects).

The nature of tasks set

Teachers give careful consideration to the tasks they set and their purpose. Independent Learning tasks are never set as an after-thought; they are an integral part of the week's lesson planning. Activities set are never just "finishing off" tasks (although they may be completion of activities started in class if this is pre-planned.)

It is the role of the teacher to explain the exact purpose of an independent learning task to the students and to ensure that it is recorded by them in their student organisers. The Independent Learning is then used by the teacher as a springboard for the next lesson's learning.

Researchers recommend that Independent Learning tasks are varied and that, where possible, choice is offered, for example in the task undertaken or the way that research is presented.

Four common and effective types of independent learning are:

- 1. Preparation:** Some independent learning is designed to prepare the student for the next lesson, for example the teacher may get students to research the concept of global warming prior to systematically studying it in class or a group may be required to read the next two chapters of a novel in preparation for a Harkness discussion. This type of independent learning is crucial to the practice of students playing a proactive role in and having responsibility for the effectiveness of the learning activities of lessons. At Isaac Newton Academy all students are expected to come to every lesson fully prepared for the discussion and tasks to be undertaken, having completed any pre-reading, being fully equipped with the information required for activities they will participate in and having given thought to the concepts that will be further explored (see Teaching and Learning Policy). For their part, teachers come to every lesson prepared to draw out from students the lesson learnt from their Independent Learning.
- 2. Practice:** Some independent learning tasks provide students with an opportunity to practice a skill, e.g. practising shading in Art, practising a scale in Music, practising a serve in tennis, completing self-directed learning tasks using software packages or practising conjugating a verb in languages. These tasks are designed to provide the opportunity for increasing speed and improving accuracy and fluency. When independent learning is assigned for the purposes of practice, it should be structured around content with which the students have a high degree of familiarity. Practising a skill with which a student is unfamiliar is not only inefficient but might also serve to habituate errors or misconceptions. Skills should be learnt to the level that students can perform them quickly and accurately. To facilitate skill development, students should be encouraged to keep track of their speed and accuracy. Research tells us that it is not until students have practiced upwards of about 24 times that they reach 80% competency. Practice needs to be deliberate, focused practice to ensure

mastery. Hattie (2011) calls this 'overlearning': this is 'what happens when we reach a stage of knowing what to do without thinking about it, reducing the load on our thinking and cognition, allowing us to attend to new ideas.'

3. **Elaboration** on what has been learnt in class. This type of independent learning is designed to ensure that the student processes the information in order to deepen their understanding. It enables the teacher to gauge the level of the student's confidence with new information and depth of understanding. Some suggested general independent learning tasks designed to apply and reinforce knowledge gained & concepts learnt in class are:
 - In 50 words, explain to an imaginary 8 year old brother what you have learnt today. The word and age limit require the student to think hard and process and translate the information into simple language. Rather than regurgitating technical language, they have to explain it, so demonstrating their understanding.
 - Explain what you have learnt to a parent/carer and write a short explanation for your parent/carer to sign and comment on – a great way to engage the parent/carer in their child's learning.
 - Choose two questions in your textbook, one easy and one hard. Don't answer them but explain why the easy one is easy and why the other isn't.
4. **Exploration:** This provides an opportunity for students to explore topics of their own interest and delve into an area of study in more detail than time allows for in the curriculum, so broadening their knowledge e.g. researching marriage rituals in a different religion than the one studied in class, reading another novel by an author whose work is being studied in class. It affords students the opportunity and space to become expert researchers and to report back to their peers is important. It is excellent preparation for students to take the lead as 'teacher' in lessons e.g. conducting an experiment or giving a demonstration. Exploration tasks allow teachers to stretch students (and themselves!) and encourage them to engage in further reading and teacher challenges. They are an excellent way to extend students towards A and A* grades.

Teachers are expected to give careful thought to differentiation of independent learning tasks to maximise their impact on students' progress and learning. Activities should be challenging and serve to stretch students, but not so difficult that they cannot be completed independently with a relatively high success rate. Activities must be accessible to students at differing attainment levels and those with EAL.

Resources to Support Independent Learning

A: Completing Independent Learning in the Isaac Newton Academy library.

All students are welcome to take advantage of the library as an ideal space in which to complete independent learning tasks. The library is open before school from 8am and each evening until 6pm. There is always a member of staff on hand to facilitate independent learning. In 2001, research by MacBeath, Kirwan and Myers (University of Strathclyde) showed that students who attended

homework clubs gained on average one extra GCSE grade C+ and that attendance had a favourable effect on attitudes to school.

B: Use of Music Practice Rooms

Students are encouraged to make use of the 7 practice rooms before school, at lunchtime and after school to practice their musical instrument.

C: Use of ICT resources and Independent Learning Software

Students are encouraged to use pcs in and adjacent to the Library before school, during lunchtimes and after school to access independent learning software, to access resources on the Academy's VLE and to engage in discussion in on-line forums.

NB: Our ambition, when our staffing capacity expands, is to run an Independent Learning base in addition to the Library, to have an extra ICT room open and staffed before school and after school and to set up a Saturday School at which students could choose to complete Independent Learning.

Setting Independent Learning Tasks

Staff set Independent Learning activities at the most logical point in the lesson, but never in a rush at the end. They are expected to ensure that every student has recorded the full details of the task set in their student organiser, including the purpose of the task and the 'due in' date. Stretch tasks are available for each scheme of learning on Fronter to extend high attaining students.

Monitoring the recording and completion of Independent Learning Tasks

Form tutors ensure that each tutee has their Independent Learning timetable recorded in their student organiser at the start of the year and that they understand how it operates. They check that all tutees have recorded their Independent Learning activities for the day at each afternoon registration and check on completion of independent learning tasks at morning tutor time. Once per week they sign the student organiser, having checked that the parent/carer has signed off all the Independent Learning tasks as completed. They pick up on any issues raised by the parent/carer in the student organiser. See Form Tutor Roles and Responsibilities document.

Middle and Senior Leaders conduct book looks, student organiser checks, VLE checks and student interviews to monitor the implementation of the Independent Learning Policy.

Discussion of Independent Learning Activities

At Isaac Newton Academy all staff engage in learning dialogues with students. They encourage students to see the importance of Independent Learning and to support them with it by finding opportunities to discuss the activities they are engaged in, for example when on break duty, having lunch with students or supporting them in the Library, through on-line forums and discussion groups.

Feedback on Independent Learning Activities

If Independent Learning is assigned it should always be commented on by the teacher. Walberg's study of 1999 found that the effects of independent learning vary greatly, depending on the feedback that the teacher provides. He maintained that homework assigned but not commented on generates an effect of 0.28. When graded, the effect size increases to 0.78. Homework on which the teacher provides written comments for students has an effect size of 0.83. All teachers at Isaac Newton Academy are expected to provide feedback on **all** independent learning completed (see Assessment For Learning policy).

Consequences of failing to submit an independent learning task by the deadline

If a student experiences difficulty in completing an Independent Learning task he/she is expected to see the teacher who set the activity before the day when it is due in for assistance/clarification. If a student arrives at a lesson without completed independent learning, the teacher will set a same day 1 hour IL detention. The administrator will inform the tutor that the detention has been set for that day and the tutor will remind the student at pm registration. A text will be sent to the parent/carer as early as possible in the day to inform them that their child is being detained. Whenever possible, the class teacher will return to the IL room to see the student, to check that the Independent Learning has been completed and to dismiss the student. A weekend detention of 2 hours (supervised by a member of SLT) is set for any student who accrues 5 IL detentions in any one term.

Parental involvement in Independent Learning

It is important that a description of the types of parental involvement that are and are not acceptable when it comes to independent learning is provided. While it is certainly legitimate to inform parents/carers of the independent learning tasks assigned, and they can play a valuable role in facilitating the learning, it is important that they do not help with the tasks. Parents should not solve content problems for students.

Parents/carers can support their child with his/her independent learning activities by

- helping to set up a consistent and organised place for them to complete tasks at home
- helping them to establish a regular routine for the completion of independent learning tasks
- encouraging, motivating and prompting them, but not sitting with them while they complete tasks
- talking to them about which tasks they found straightforward, which were difficult, how they coped with the challenge, what they learnt etc.
- ensuring that they stop working at bedtime
- letting the relevant teacher know if they experience significant difficulty in completing independent learning tasks

Parent/carer involvement in Independent Learning will be discussed at the annual New Parents Evening in September of Year 7.

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