Primary schools in NSW are allowing children to opt out of homework, while others are reviewing their homework policies as time-poor families struggle to keep up with the extra school work being sent home.

At Cambridge Park Public School in Sydney, parents can give permission to permanently excuse their children from homework, with other schools including Maroubra Junction, Yarrawarrah and Mingoola having similar opt-out options.

"Homework provides students with an opportunity to practice classroom learning and develop self-management and study skills," the letter from Cambridge Park said.
Wants to ban homework for children aged under 11: French president Francois Hollande. *Photo: AFP*

"It also provides parents with some idea of what skills and knowledge children are learning in the classroom. However the school recognises that parents are best placed to make decisions about whether or not their children have the capacity or time to complete homework."

At Gymea Bay Public, parents are being surveyed about their attitudes towards homework, reasonable tasks for homework, how much homework is enough and what a school policy on homework should include.

A recent OECD report found that students in Australia's private schools do two hours' more homework each week than their public school peers but their results were are no better once socio-economic advantage was taken into consideration.

The NSW Department of Education allows schools to decide their own homework policies and unlike other states, does not have recommend times for homework, although it does suggest that homework not be given in kindergarten.

In Victoria, schools are told the early primary years (prep to year 4) should not be given more than 30 minutes a day and none on weekends, while older primary students should be given no more than 45 minutes homework a day.

In a research document attached to its homework policy, the NSW department points to evidence that says homework in primary school does not necessarily improve results.

"Most researchers conclude that for primary students, there is no evidence that homework lifts academic performance," the document says.
Education academic Mike Horsley, who co-wrote the book *Reforming Homework*, said there was a “fair degree of difference” in how parents and teachers valued homework.

“For some parents, homework presents specific challenges in the modern lifestyles, so with the changes in the workplace and living arrangements, more traditional types of homework presents challenges and in some cases these challenges have turned into a fair bit of family conflict,” Professor Horsley said.

“There is a fair bit of research that says homework doesn't have a great contribution to learning as measured by standardised tests but that does not mean we should abandon homework.

“We argued in our book that homework should be reformed and be much more aligned to how learning should occur.”

The French president Francois Hollande has said he wants to ban homework for children aged under 11 but Professor Horsley said he would not support this.

“We say in our book that we should not ban homework because it is important for kids to get themselves organised and manage their own learning, but if it is hours and hours of drill and practice, then we would not support that,” he said.