

MY HIGHGATE

I ANALYSIS

Shanta Acharya is the author of 10 books, including five volumes of poetry. Her first novel, *A World Elsewhere*, is released this month. Ms Acharya, who lives in Bloomfield Road, Highgate, programmes poetry readings at Lauderdale House.



What brought you to Highgate? I wanted to live in a part of London that is green, welcoming, lively and culturally aware. I've lost count of the number of flats I viewed in various parts of London before I walked into mine in Highgate, and knew this was it. I've lived here since.

What's the best memory you have of the area? There are a few, actually – many to do with chance encounters with wonderfully creative people. I remember, for example, running into Jonathan Pryce while window shopping at The Ripping Yarn.

How has Highgate changed since you moved into the area? The street I live in has changed – the local police station and magistrates' court are gone. The proposed building of a high-rise, housing development will change things further.

What would you change about Highgate? For such a beautiful location, there is too much traffic and pollution. I'd like some local shops stocking fresh produce. Now, this may not prove popular, but the shops along Archway Road could be incentivised to decorate their exterior facades.

If you were editor of the Ham&High for a day, what local issue would you champion? Make sure the excellent schools, hospitals, local parks and green spaces, and other services are protected. I'd also champion local businesses.

What tips would you give to somebody moving to the area? Be open to new experiences, smile when things are hard. I'd also wish them luck with neighbours – as good neighbours will take care of everything.

If you had to write your own epitaph what would it say? "We are not measured by how our lives evolve for us, Only the manner of our moulding it as it is briefly lent to us." From my poem *Taking Stock*.

Shanta Acharya was in conversation with Imogen Blake

“For such a beautiful location, there is too much traffic and pollution. This may not prove popular, but the shops along Archway Road could be incentivised to decorate their exterior facades”

Homework is here to stay, teachers pledge

Schools weigh in on debate over pupils' workloads

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Parents and pupils alike will agree that it can be the most tedious aspect of school life.

But like it or lump it, homework is here to stay – or at least it is for most schools.

Last week, Cheltenham Ladies College in Gloucestershire made national headlines after it reported that it would consider banning homework altogether.

But will independent schools in Hampstead and Highgate soon be following suit?

The *Ham&High* asked a handful of teachers to weigh in on the debate and review the benefits and the downfalls of the practice.

Dawn Moore, headteacher of King Alfred School in Golders Green, has previously stated that teachers shouldn't set homework until pupils reach the final years of primary education to prevent overloading children at too young an age.

But she went on to say: "We don't agree with a complete ban on homework as it can help children develop their independent learning skills, provided it is set appropriately."

"We have conducted research into the value of homework across the school community and we will use this to review our current practice and make changes wherever necessary."

Over the course of five years, the Gloucestershire school will determine whether to keep homework in a bid to tackle teenage depression and stress.

Pupils will attend weekly meditation classes, as well as being given twice as long to walk between



King Alfred headteacher Dawn Moore and Highgate head Adam Pettitt

lessons. Cheltenham's principal Eve Jardine-Young, who dubbed homework a "Victorian practice", has warned against "an epidemic of anxiety that we've created for ourselves as a society" as a result of too much evening work.

At University College School (UCS) in Hampstead, teachers are in the process of drawing up new guidelines on homework for the next academic year, to allow pupils more flexibility over their workloads.

Mark English, deputy headteacher at UCS, said that good pastoral care is vital at all schools to ensure children's mental health is not affected by excessive amounts of homework.

He said: "Pupils who are happy, settled and well achieve great things. We are very lucky at UCS as our pastoral and academic support dovetails. We must be mindful of the need to manage workloads."

"Our pupils are very well known to teachers so if mental health problems do arise, it is handled with sensitivity and discretion."

Mark Webster, principal of St Margaret's School in Hampstead, said his school is not about to abolish homework, but highlighted how homework can negatively impact on pupils' wellbeing and development.

He said: "During term time at least, having to cope with huge amounts of homework can come at the expense of other worthwhile pursuits, not least interacting with one's family."

"Some might argue that it builds character, but equally some might argue it does just the opposite."

But Highgate School's headteacher Adam Pettitt strongly believes in the value of homework in preparing pupils for the future.

He said: "Pupils go to school and they have time for socialising and relaxation. It's not as if kids go to school and sit down hard at their desks all day like you or I might do. So when they come home they learn to pull things together and think for themselves. They build a capacity for independent study and increase their employability."

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