Good Morning,

I too had more than one kid attend Yinghua, and noticed a huge difference in how long their homework took.  Whereas the amount of homework was similar for all three kids in (for example) 3rd grade, my oldest took hours to finish, my second took around 10 minutes, and my third takes about 30 min (outside of reading).  Here's a few tricks we've used that have helped us...

* ***Create a space for homework away from distractions and close to you.***  When we first started having homework, I envisioned my eldest doing it in her room.  However, the dining room table works much better for us as there aren't as many distractions and I can keep a better eye on their progress.
* ***Don't be scared to take a break.***  Some kids are totally wiped out after school.  Sitting down to homework immediately after coming home is unproductive.  With my eldest, I found that she finished at about the same time if she started immediately after school or if she played/exercised for a bit first and then sat down to homework - and her attitude was much better if she took that break. Kids need some free time too, and it's ok to put that as an equal priority.
* ***Find out how much homework they have right away.***  Although I let my kids have a break before starting their hwk, I ask or check what they need to do immediately.  That way, I can gauge how much time they'll need or if there are any extra items they'll need help with (like printing off pictures).  This helps keep my stress level down - also important.
* ***Break the homework up into smaller chunks.***  Instead of telling an overwhelmed kid to do their homework, try asking them how long they think it will take just to get their Chinese character homework done.  Ok, let's do that.  Don't worry about the rest right now.  See if they can get it done in their estimated time frame and congratulate them.  Then, you can move on to the next subject.
* ***Identify which subjects to start with.***  Some kids do better starting with the things that are harder for them and getting them out of the way.  Other kids do better starting with the easy stuff and feeling a sense of accomplishment.  Help your kid identify what works better for them.
* ***Be available to answer questions.***  I know this is tough!!!  However, being close at hand to answer quick questions as they arise can often mean that the kids finish quicker and free up more of your time later on.
* ***Help beginning readers read through their math***.  As a former HS math teacher, I love the extra emphasis our math curriculum has on word problems and applying mathematics.  However, as mom to a couple kids who took a bit longer to learn to read comfortably, it can be frustrating.  Reading through the problems or instructions with your child can help them feel more confident on what they're doing in math and help them to tackle the problems more quickly and with fewer errors.  Remember, not every day is a heavy reading day in math, but some are and I usually count those towards our reading time for English.
* ***Do the English homework when your schedule allows.***  English homework is given for the week, so feel free to divide it up in the way that works best for your family's schedule.
* ***Encourage your child to utilize time at school to get their homework started!***Teachers are on hand to answer questions and kids can start their homework at the end of the school day. I let them know how thrilled I am when they get home and already have something done.
* ***Try not to stress about it*** (at least not in front of the kids).  Easier said than done, but kids catch cues from us.  I try my best to support their homework in front of them and to teach them when enough's enough and we just need to call it quits for the night.  I also estimate their reading time rather than setting a timer as that adds too much stress for us.

This is what helped us.  I'm sure that others have their own suggestions - please feel free to share.  All kids are unique and different things work better for each of them.  On the plus side, my oldest (who always took forever with her homework) suddenly had things click for her last year and she's now far more able to manage her own homework and schedule (YEA!)  If you are concerned with the level of homework, periodically Yinghua has surveyed families to find out how long the homework is taking - please do take the time to fill out one of those surveys the next time they are sent out.  Also, remember that this listserv is for parents.  Teachers and administrators do not receive these messages.  If you have questions or concerns, it's important to bring those up directly with your child's teacher or the school administration.

I assume that we'll always have slightly more homework than some other non-immersion schools because we need to cover all the same standards/objectives plus Chinese and because our school has high expectations for the students.  Sometimes this is tough, but I'd much rather be dealing with a school that has high expectations and I need to figure out how to balance that with a healthy lifestyle than with a school that didn't think my child was capable of much.

Ruth