

Spixworth Infant School

The Teaching of Spelling



Dear Parents/Carers,

Over the past term, we have been reviewing the ways in which we teach spelling. Making use of the latest research and detailed analysis of the outcomes for our children, we have decided to make a few changes in our teaching of spelling.

What is working well?

Phonics

Every day, every child is participating in a high quality, synthetic phonics lesson using the Letters and Sounds programme. This programme of study is divided into six phases, with each phase building on the skills and knowledge of previous learning. Children have time to practise and rapidly expand their ability to read and spell words. They are also taught to read and spell 'tricky' words, which are words with unusual spelling patterns or that contain graphemes (written sounds) that have not yet been taught. We know this is working well because the results of our statutory Phonic Screening Checks continue to rise.

As children become competent in using their phonological understanding to make sensible attempts at spelling words, for example that the word 'beak' could be spelt 'beek', 'beak' or 'beke', children need to move beyond phonics to learning about other strategies to choose the correct spelling. This broadening of understanding begins in Year 2 and supports children in rooting their understanding in the context of written text.

Support from home

The support you give your child at home, whether this be in reading their books at home, completing homework activities, practising spelling lists or simply in spending time talking together, makes a positive difference to how well your child progresses in school. We do recognise that your time as a family is precious and want to ensure that what we ask you to do is as effective as possible.

What could we do even better?

Spelling lists

Research shows that the traditional spelling test is one of short term memory and does not support children in understanding the principles of spelling. Recent scans of the brain have shown that when children learn spellings for a test they are using a different part of their brain entirely from when they tackle spellings in the context of their writing.

Analysing the spelling of our own children has confirmed this. Children who perform well in spelling tests show little or no improvement in their spelling within other writing. Children who find learning spelling lists difficult, not only do not use the spellings correctly in writing but also find the task of learning spelling lists stressful and often feel unnecessary pressure on the day of the test. The pressure on parents to 'drill' their children on spelling lists as well as

the expectation that every child should read regularly at home and complete other homework activities gave another reason for us to review our practice.

How will we ensure our children become successful at spelling without a test?

The daily work we undertake in phonics will have a greater focus on spelling. To increase the impact of this work, in every class the spelling words for each week will also be the spelling focus in all of the written work that the children undertake for that week. This will mean that the children will not only be taught how to spell the words, but will be given every opportunity to use and apply these spellings in context.

The relationship between spelling and handwriting will also become a focus through phonics lessons and applied in all writing. Children will be taught how to join diagraphs (2-letter sounds, e.g. /ai/) and other common spelling patterns (e.g. /eigh/) as they are taught, many from Reception. The physical flow of writing will then be supporting patterns for spelling.

For children who have moved beyond phonetic spelling, mainly the children in Year 2, they will build a 'spelling log'. This log will be an individual record of the spellings that each child needs to learn. The words will be taken from mistakes made in their own writing (up to a maximum of five words) with the expectation that the next time children need to use these words, they check their spelling log and apply them correctly. In this way, children take ownership of their own spelling development, making learning to spell more meaningful.

How can you help at home?

To support you in understanding how children develop as successful spellers and how you can best support at home, we have created a Parents' Pack for Supporting Spelling. The pack gives you a more detailed overview of why, how and what we teach in spelling at Spixworth. Spelling lists that are expected to be known by the end of each Key Stage are included and a bank of ideas for fun activities for how you can practise spelling at home is included. The pack will be available on our school website for you to access throughout the year and make duplicate copies of any word lists/activities you may want. Please let your child's class teacher know by Monday 21st September if you cannot access online materials so a paper copy can be made available to you.

The focus words for each class will be sent home at the beginning of each half term for your information. These words will not be 'tested' but there will be an expectation that over the course of the half term, all children will make progress in spelling these words correctly within their writing.

We hope that you find the information in this letter and the Parents' Pack helpful. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to speak to your child's class teacher or Ms Jordan.

Happy spelling!

Ms H. Jordan
Deputy Headteacher, English Subject Leader