

Spelling Policy (to include Early Years)

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1. Introduction

It is important that both parents and pupils have access to a practical *whole-school policy on spelling*. All parents, therefore, should be provided with a copy of this document. This policy – designed for staff, parents and pupils – gives practical advice and information on how pupils' spelling can be improved. Accurate spelling is important because:

- It aids communication and understanding.
- It creates a good impression of the writer.
- It frees the writer to be more expressive.
- It can prevent the writer's ideas being quickly dismissed, as they may be if the spelling is inaccurate.

There are some *fundamental principles* on which this policy is based:

- Correct spelling is crucial in any form of written work, be it handwritten or computer generated.
- Spelling is a skill that can be taught and learnt.
- Spelling failure can occur throughout the ability and age range.
- All pupils can improve on their spelling as long as:
 1. They are shown how.
 2. They are willing to learn.
 3. They have confidence in their ability to improve and do not consider themselves as 'poor spellers'.
- Every teacher – no matter what their subject area – must be aware of the importance of creating opportunities for pupils to improve their spelling. Most obviously, pupils will need to learn some more 'exotic' language which is specific to particular subject areas e.g. polygon, chemical, hydrochloride, volcano ... but every piece of written work should be seen as a potential opportunity to improve spelling skills.
- If spelling is not taught well, pupils' written work may deteriorate; i.e. they may lose confidence in attempting to apply their verbal vocabulary to their written work, resulting in less creative language being used for fear of making spelling errors, i.e. using the word "nice" instead of "splendid".

2. Improving Spelling

Perhaps the most important aspect of helping to improve spelling is to try to ensure that pupils do not see themselves as poor spellers who cannot be taught how to improve. It may be that they do not have a good memory for certain things, such as the order in which letters should go. However, with commitment and hard work from the pupil, the right kind of help, lots of support and encouragement, and a belief that they can learn to spell better, they will become competent spellers.

a) **Marking**

Marking can be one of the most significant strategies by which spelling can be improved. A consistent whole-school approach is required, but this must also be flexible enough to meet the needs of the individual child.

When teachers – of whatever subject – mark written work they will be considering primarily aspects such as how good the ideas are, how well the thoughts are organised, how well a lesson has been understood, how much research has been done, how clearly the pupil has expressed their ideas etc. The spelling, by itself, will not be the *most* important thing about the work. However, it is always one important factor in the quality of communication achieved – and so may well need to be assessed and commented on. Teachers usually do not correct all of the spelling mistakes, because too many corrections may have a negative effect on the pupil's self-confidence. Errors are not corrected to criticise the pupil's work, but in order to show that a word is not spelt the way the pupil thinks. Teachers will show pupils where and how they can learn to spell more accurately by the following means:

- When work is marked the extent to which spelling errors are identified depends very much upon the nature of the work and the individual pupil's ability. The aim is to improve competence whilst also maintaining confidence. An able child will usually have most of his/her mistakes corrected, or may only have one page of a longer piece assessed.
- Spelling mistakes are ringed or underlined and identified by the letters 'sp'.
- Usually, pupils will then correct the word themselves, though where the teacher considers it appropriate a correction may be provided.
- If the same mistake is repeated, it will only be marked once.
- We will remind pupils of this simple strategy – look it up, cover it up, write it up, check again. All pupils are issued with a spelling notebook in which all words, which have been misspelt and then learned, should be entered.
- If a common error is discovered within a form, appropriate class discussion/teaching takes place.
- If a well-known rule of spelling is frequently broken (e.g. i before e except after c), the rule and how to apply are pointed out.

b) **General Strategies for Teachers and Parents**

- Encourage the child. Praise him/her for the words, which he/she can spell correctly, and for any attempts made to spell difficult words.
- Try not to let the child become disheartened.
- Try to remain optimistic yourself about improvements – no matter how slight. Remember that if you remain optimistic then the child is more likely to remain hopeful about getting better at spelling. In such circumstances there is more likelihood that the child will invest the effort that is required.
- It may be helpful for class teachers to provide pupils and parents with lists of common words related to their subject area that are often spelt incorrectly.
- It is often helpful when a class is beginning work on a new topic for the teacher to provide pupils with a list of useful spellings. Indeed, key words for each topic may be displayed prominently in the classroom.
- Dictionaries should be available in each classroom.
- Remember that communication and enjoyment of the language are of paramount importance.

- Use any opportunities that might arise naturally to help with spelling e.g. point out letter patterns in their names, or names of family members e.g. “Andrew”, “few”, “new”, “chew” etc. Or point out familiar words from e.g. food labels, TV adverts, newspapers and magazines, street signs etc.

Do not ask a child to learn a difficult word, without suggesting to them some way of doing so. Note that sounding out individual *letters* is unlikely to be helpful. For example, “sih pih eh lih ih nih gih” does not say or spell the word “spelling”. *Syllables* are the basic auditory unit of words, and pupils with good auditory memories may be able to retain a complex spelling by breaking it down into such units.

3. Identifying those who might need extra help

There will be pupils who require specific support and assistance above and beyond that already described, and it is very important that such pupils are identified early in their school career so that appropriate additional provision may be made. In the early stages of each academic year, teachers within the English Department will seek to identify any cases of specific need and determine the kind of support needed. In this they will be guided by the School’s Learning Support Co-ordinator. Other subject teachers with significant concerns about any pupil’s spelling should report this to the appropriate member of the English Department/Head of English, who can then ensure that appropriate action is taken. Parents, also, may have specific concerns in this area, which they should feel free to explore with their child’s English teacher.

Pupils identified as having severe spelling problems are targeted for expert help by the School’s Learning Support Department. Structured support programmes tailored to individual needs are set up following discussion with parents/guardians. Within the Junior School and Fiveways pupils will be supported by Targeted Intervention Groups. In the Senior School either individual support from the Learning Support Department or via in an in-class support profile being implemented by class teachers. The parents/guardians can then play an active and/or supporting role in their child’s language development.