

A guide for parents

Helping your child with spelling

When we write we have to consider a number of aspects.

- We need to know what the purpose of our writing is and for whom we are writing.
- We need to think about the content and what form our writing will take, for example, is it a shopping list, a report, a letter to a friend, an email?
- We then need to think about the structure appropriate to the purpose and form of our writing – the use of sentences, paragraphs and punctuation.
- We then select the vocabulary that will best convey our meaning.
- And finally we think about how to spell the words we write.

Children can find writing a real challenge; they need encouragement, support and praise for their efforts. You can best support them by encouraging them to write on every possible occasion, praising their efforts and, importantly, by letting them see you writing whenever possible. You can play word games with them (e.g. **I spy, Find the word** puzzles), you can point to interesting or new words as you read to your child (without interrupting the flow of the story) and you can compose emails together.

Most of us, even if we consider ourselves to be good spellers, make spelling mistakes at some point. What is important is that we know what to do when we get stuck and we know how to correct our mistakes.

The English language is a rich but complex language but, despite its complexity, 85% of the English spelling system is predictable. Your child will learn the rules and conventions of the system and the spelling strategies needed to become a confident speller.

Here are some of the strategies that will help your child become a confident and accurate speller:

- sounding words out: breaking the word down into phonemes (e.g. *c-a-t, sh-e-ll*) – many words cannot be sounded out so other strategies are needed;
- dividing the word into syllables, say each syllable as they write the word (e.g. *re-mem-ber*);

- using the **Look, say, cover, write, check** strategy: look at the word and say it out aloud, then cover it, write it and check to see if it is correct. If not, highlight or underline the incorrect part and repeat the process;
- using mnemonics as an aid to memorising a tricky word (e.g. *people: people eat orange peel like elephants; could: O U Lucky Duck*);
- finding words within words (e.g. *a rat* in *separate*);
- making links between the meaning of words and their spelling (e.g. *sign, signal, signature*) – this strategy is used at a later stage than others;
- working out spelling rules for themselves – a later strategy;
- using a dictionary as soon as they know how to.

Encourage your child to have a go at spelling words they are unsure of. This will give them the opportunity to try out spelling strategies and to find those that they find useful. You can help them to use the strategies outlined above and praise their efforts.