



21st September 2018

Dear Parents

Spelling in Years 3, 4, 5 & 6

I am writing to give you details or an update of how spelling is taught in Years 3-6. As the children will not be returning home with weekly lists to learn, I wanted to reassure you that spelling remains an important area of English that is regularly targeted in lessons and, in fact, the department is working hard to raise its profile. However, there is no 'one way suits all' method of teaching (unfortunately) – children learn to spell in many ways - so we too use a variety of approaches to help children master spelling.

Occasionally, lists will be sent home, but when they are not, children will be developing their own personal spelling banks and targeting approximately 5 words a week. These words will be taken from a range of sources: the spelling focus of the week; corrected spellings within their marked books; from the statutory word lists for Years 3-6. They may work with partners within their English group to check the troublesome words at a designated point in the week. Limiting the number of words aims to ensure success and enable deeper learning.

Over the next few weeks, children will be introduced incrementally to various strategies to help learn spellings and patterns (I am attaching a copy of the 'No Nonsense' strategies we model and use in class). They will use spelling journals to try out different approaches, constantly revisiting, researching and learning to spell accurately. Learning at home should be an extension of the practice at school as well as a quick test of memory. There is little evidence that the traditional practice of learning spellings at home and being tested on them is effective. However, there is a high expectation within the new National Curriculum that pupils will learn many increasingly complex words.

The aims of this approach are: for pupils to take responsibility for their spelling learning; to discuss their learning with class members and parents; to refer back to previous lessons and for teachers to see how pupils are tackling tricky bits of spelling. It will also provide scope for strong spellers to research and experiment with words and vocabulary.

One of the English Department's targets is to foster a pride and respect for our wonderful language and a desire to preserve tradition. I am a great fan of technology and keen to embrace the opportunities it holds, but I have noticed a decline in accuracy and determination to spell words correctly with 'spell-check' voiced as a reason not to worry. To an extent, this argument is valid. However, at this time of transition, children's ability not only in English, but across the curriculum, is judged through their written work. Therefore, to communicate effectively, spelling and handwriting remain integral and important elements.

Last academic year, we piloted an online spelling program called Spellzone (<https://www.spellzone.com>) where each child was given their own username and password, which generated a personalised pathway following an initial test and then worked through modules at home and in class. An assessment report recorded an encouraging average pupil progress of 8 %, by the end of the year and so this program will be available again. Teachers will be reminding pupils of usernames and passwords if they feel it will be of advantage. However, I am aware that some found this program difficult to access from home and we are currently looking into an English equivalent Sumdog programme. We will keep you updated.

I hope that the above gives you an insight into the approach we are taking to teaching spelling at Town Close. Should you like some practical ideas as to how you might support your child with their spellings, please email me. I can send you a booklet with ideas and activities to help secure learning, many of which will be covered in the lessons.

Finally, I am attaching a list of the statutory word lists for Years 3-6, which can also be found on Firefly. They are not easy!

If you have any questions, I would be happy to offer my thoughts either by e-mail or in person.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Chitty', written on a light-colored background.

Ghislaine Chitty
Head of English

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