



Spelling Policy for Parents

We are writing to share some exciting news about how we are teaching spelling at Denham Village School. This year we have introduced a new approach, one grounded in the best available research evidence. This communication is to explain what has changed, why we have made these changes, and most importantly, how you can support your child at home.

We have moved away from the traditional model of sending home a list of words and testing them on Friday. Research is very clear that this approach, whilst familiar, does not lead to children becoming confident, accurate spellers. Instead, we are now teaching spelling in a richer and more powerful way; through patterns, daily practice and dictation.

We are confident that this development will make a real difference. We hope this document answers your questions and helps you feel part of the journey.

Why We Have Changed Our Approach to Spelling

For many years, in schools across the country, including ours - the standard approach to spelling was a familiar one: a list of words goes home, children learn them during the week, and they are tested on Friday. It feels reassuring because it is structured and measurable. But the research tells us something important: children who do well on a Friday spelling test very often cannot spell those same words correctly a few weeks later, and they struggle to use them accurately in their own writing.

What the research tells us

Spelling must be explicitly taught. A landmark study by Graham and Santangelo (2014), reviewing over 50 research studies involving more than 6,000 children, found that spelling improves most when it is directly and deliberately taught — not simply practised or tested.

Word lists alone do not work. Research consistently shows that giving children lists of words to memorise produces short-term gains on tests but does not lead to lasting spelling improvement. Children need to understand WHY a word is spelled the way it is, not just memorise its letters.

Daily practice beats weekly cramming. Research into memory and learning is very clear: short, regular practice spread across the week is far more effective than trying to learn a list in one or two sessions. Little and often really does work.

Understanding patterns is the key. Children who understand the patterns and rules that govern English spelling, including how words are built from smaller parts, become more confident, accurate and independent spellers than those who simply memorise words by rote.

What We Do Now. Our Approach

Our approach to spelling is built on four connected ideas that work together to help every child become a confident and accurate speller.

1. Learning spelling patterns

Each week, your child's class focuses on a spelling pattern rather than a random list of words. A spelling pattern might be:

- A sound pattern for example, words containing the "tion" sound
- A word-building pattern for example, words with the prefix "un-" or the suffix "-ness"
- A word family for example, words related to the root word "sign" (signal, signature, design)
- An etymology pattern for example, words that come from Latin or Greek and share a meaning

By understanding the pattern, children can apply it to words they have never seen before, not just the specific words on a list. This is a much more powerful and lasting approach.

2. Daily spelling practice

Rather than one big learning session at the start of the week, your child practises spelling for a short time every day at school. These daily activities are varied and might include:

- Saying words aloud and listening for the pattern within them
- "Look, say, cover, write, check" activities
- Sorting words into groups by their pattern or meaning
- Building new words using prefixes, suffixes and root words
- Writing focus words accurately in sentences
- Handwriting practice: reinforcing spelling through the physical act of writing

These sessions are brief, usually five to ten minutes, but consistent.

3. Using spelling in real writing

At DVS, spelling is not treated as a separate subject that exists only in spelling lessons. We expect children to apply the patterns they are learning in all of their writing, across every subject.

We teach children to take responsibility for their own spelling by:

- Using the class spelling wall and word displays
- Using dictionaries and thesauruses with growing confidence
- Proofreading their own writing for spelling errors
- Making connections between words they know and new words they encounter in their reading

When spelling becomes part of the habit of writing, not a separate test to pass, children develop real, transferable skills.

4. Dictation instead of a spelling test

Instead of a traditional spelling test where a teacher reads out individual words and children write them down, we will use dictation as our main form of spelling assessment.

In a dictation, the teacher reads a short passage or set of sentences and children write them down. This means children must:

- Apply their spelling knowledge in the context of real sentences
- Use their punctuation knowledge at the same time eg capital letters, full stops, commas and more
- Hold a sentence in their memory and write it accurately
- Listen carefully and think about meaning as well as spelling

Research clearly supports dictation as a far more valid and meaningful test of real spelling ability than a word-by-word test. It tells us much more about whether a child can actually spell not just recall a list.

What a Typical Spelling Week Looks Like

Below is a guide to the typical weekly spelling routine across Key Stage 2 (Years 3–6). In Key Stage 1, spelling is closely linked to our phonics programme and daily phonics lessons.

Day	What your child does in school	What this develops
Monday	The teacher introduces the week's spelling pattern. Children explore why the words follow that pattern and generate their own examples. The word wall is updated.	Understanding of patterns and rules the "why" behind the spelling.
Tuesday	A short oral or written rehearsal activity for example, word sorting, word building or contextual sentence writing.	Active engagement with the pattern. Making connections between words.
Wednesday	A different rehearsal activity looking at word families, morphology (prefixes, suffixes, root words) or finding the pattern in reading.	Deepening understanding. Applying the pattern to new and unfamiliar words.
Thursday	Further practice handwriting, look-say-cover-write-check, or using words in writing across the curriculum.	Reinforcing spelling through writing. Building the habit of accurate spelling in all work.
Friday	Dictation. The teacher reads a short sentences. Children write it down, applying their spelling and punctuation knowledge. Children then self-mark and identify any errors.	Real spelling in context. Punctuation. Memory. Proofreading. A meaningful picture of what the child can really do.

Spelling by Year Group — A Summary

Here is a brief guide to what your child is working towards at each stage of their time at DVS.

Year Group	Focus of Spelling Teaching
EYFS (Reception)	Spelling begins through our daily phonics programme (Little Wandle). Children learn the sounds that letters make and begin to write words by listening for sounds and representing them. There are no formal spelling lists or tests at this stage spelling is embedded in daily phonics and early writing activities.
Year 1	Children continue with daily phonics lessons, learning all 40+ phonemes. They begin to write words and simple sentences from memory. Short dictation activities begin to be used, practising both spelling and basic punctuation such as capital letters and full stops.
Year 2	Children build on their phonics knowledge and begin to encounter words where the relationship between sound and spelling is less predictable. They learn to spell common exception words, words with contractions and apostrophes, homophones, and longer words with suffixes. Dictation continues to develop.
Years 3 and 4	A significant stage where children transition from phonics-led spelling to a richer understanding of how words are built. They learn about prefixes (un-, re-, dis-) and suffixes (-tion, -ous, -ly) and begin to study word families and etymology. Children are expected to know

	all words on the national statutory word list for Years 3 and 4 (see page 4). Dictation sentences become longer and include commas and apostrophes.
Years 5 and 6	Children deepen their understanding of morphology and etymology exploring Latin and Greek roots, silent letters, and complex word patterns. They are expected to know all words on the national statutory word list for Years 5 and 6. Dictation passages are longer and require a full range of punctuation including inverted commas, colons and semi-colons.

How You Can Help at Home

You do not need to be a spelling expert to support your child at home. Here are the most helpful things you can do:

What to do	Why it helps
Ask about the pattern, not the words Ask your child "What is your spelling pattern this week?" and "Can you show me some more words that follow that pattern?" rather than testing them on the word list.	This reinforces the pattern-based approach and encourages your child to think about spelling rather than just memorise. It is also much more interesting than a simple test!
Read together every day Reading remains the single most powerful thing you can do to support your child's spelling, vocabulary and writing. Regular reading exposes children to correctly spelled words in context.	Children who read widely are consistently better spellers. When your child encounters a word in a book that follows this week's pattern, point it out, it is a genuine moment of learning.
Try Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check Look at the word carefully. Say it aloud. Cover it up. Write it from memory. Check by uncovering the word and comparing.	This classic method works well for practising specific words particularly the statutory words your child is expected to know for their year group. It is quick, simple and effective.
Celebrate the attempt, not just the result When your child makes a spelling mistake, focus on what they got right first, the sounds they represented, the parts of the word they knew, before gently showing the correct version.	Children who feel confident and safe taking risks with spelling develop faster than those who fear being wrong. Praise the effort and the thinking not just the outcome.
Use a dictionary together When your child is unsure of a spelling during homework or creative writing, encourage them to look it up in a dictionary rather than simply telling them the answer or using a spellchecker.	The act of searching for a word in a dictionary reinforces the correct spelling far more effectively than simply being told it. It also builds independence and dictionary skills.

The Statutory Word Lists

From Year 3 onwards, there are national lists of words that children are expected to be able to spell by the end of each key stage. These are called the statutory word lists and they are set by the government. At DVS, we do not simply hand these lists out and ask children to memorise them. Instead, we weave these words into our weekly pattern-based teaching so that children encounter them in meaningful contexts and understand how they work.

The statutory words for each key stage are included below for your reference. Your child's class teacher can tell you more about when and how these words will be covered during the year.

Statutory Word List — Years 3 and 4				
accident	actually	address	answer	appear
arrive	believe	bicycle	breath	breathe
build	busy / business	calendar	caught	centre
century	certain	circle	complete	consider
continue	decide	describe	different	difficult
disappear	early	earth	eight / eighth	enough
exercise	experience	experiment	extreme	famous
favourite	February	forward(s)	fruit	grammar
group	guard	guide	heard	heart
height	history	imagine	increase	important
interest	island	knowledge	learn	length
library	material	medicine	mention	minute
natural	naughty	notice	occasion(ally)	often
opposite	ordinary	particular	peculiar	perhaps
popular	position	possess(ion)	possible	potatoes
pressure	probably	promise	purpose	quarter
question	recent	regular	reign	remember
sentence	separate	special	straight	strange

strength	suppose	surprise	therefore	though / although
thought	through	various	weight	woman / women

Statutory Word List — Years 5 and 6				
accommodate	accompany	aggressive	amateur	ancient
apparent	appreciate	attached	available	average
awkward	bargain	bruise	category	cemetery
committee	communicate	community	competition	conscience
conscious	controversy	convenience	correspond	criticise
curiosity	definite	desperate	determined	develop
dictionary	disastrous	embarrass	environment	equip(ped)
especially	exaggerate	excellent	existence	explanation
familiar	foreign	forty	frequently	government
guarantee	harass	hindrance	identity	immediate(ly)
individual	interfere	interrupt	language	leisure
lightning	marvellous	mischievous	muscle	necessary
neighbour	nuisance	occupy	occur	parliament
persuade	physical	prejudice	privilege	profession
programme	pronunciation	queue	recognise	recommend
relevant	restaurant	rhyme	rhythm	sacrifice
secretary	shoulder	signature	sincere(ly)	soldier
stomach	sufficient	suggest	symbol	system
temperature	thorough	twelfth	unique	variety
vegetable	vehicle	yacht		

Support for Children with Additional Needs

We know that for some children, spelling can feel particularly challenging. Research tells us that pattern-based approaches, especially learning about how words are built from smaller parts, are particularly beneficial for children who find spelling difficult, including those with dyslexia and language difficulties.

At DVS, children who need additional support with spelling receive:

- Targeted small-group or individual support from our skilled teaching assistants
- Individual phonics sessions where needed, in addition to whole-class spelling teaching
- Adapted dictation tasks, shorter passages, additional processing time, or adult support to ensure assessment is fair and accessible
- Regular monitoring by our SENCO, who works with class teachers to ensure provision is meeting each child's individual needs

If you have any concerns about your child's spelling development, please do not hesitate to speak to their class teacher or to our SENCO. We are always happy to discuss how we can best support your child.

Common Questions from Parents

What if my child asks me to test them on their spellings?

It is wonderful if your child wants to practise! You can absolutely support them with Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check activities. But instead of testing individual words, try asking them to write a sentence using one of the focus words, or to think of another word that follows the same pattern. These activities are much closer to what we do in school and to the dictation assessment they will complete on Fridays.

My child used to score 10 out of 10 on their spelling test. Will this approach be harder?

We understand this is a change, and for some children who were very successful with word list memorisation, the new approach may initially feel different. The goal of our new approach is not to make spelling harder, it is to make spelling stick. A child who scores 10 out of 10 on a Friday test but cannot spell those words the following week, or in their own writing, has not truly learned to spell them. Our approach prioritises lasting learning and real application. Your child's teacher will always be happy to discuss how your child is getting on.

How will I know how well my child is doing?

You will receive information about your child's spelling progress through our usual channels; parents' evenings, written reports, and conversations with their class teacher. Dictation gives teachers a rich, detailed picture of each child's strengths and areas for development, and this informs our planning and any additional support we put in place. We also encourage children to take responsibility for their own spelling development, your child should be able to tell you about the pattern they are studying each week and what they are finding tricky.

A Final Word

We are really proud of this development at Denham Village School. It reflects our commitment to doing what the evidence tells us is best for children. We know that change can feel uncertain, and we are grateful for your trust and your partnership.

If you have any questions about our spelling approach that are not answered in this document, please speak to your child's class teacher or contact the school office to arrange a conversation with our English subject lead. We are always happy to talk through any aspect of what we do and why.

Thank you for your continued support.

Mrs Seema Sharma

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