

What impact do multisensory spelling strategies have on spelling scores across KS1?

Southwold School, KS1 Phase

Abstract

The focus of this study was to explore how targeted multisensory spelling interventions would support children across KS1 to improve their spelling scores. Spelling was a focus for the whole school this year, and it was evident through a newly implemented tracking system that many children across KS1 were scoring at seven or below. The study would aimed to increase the average weekly spelling scores of all children through approach whilst providing precise support for key children. It was designed to examine how using a range of different spelling strategies would affect the children's spelling scores and their ability to apply knowledge of spellings to their written outcomes independently. Evidence shows that the intervention improved the children's spelling scores overall by the end of the study. More children were able to routinely apply their knowledge of their spelling patterns into written work. The class teachers involved in the study stated it had a positive impact on the children's spelling scores, ability to spell in lessons, and attitudes towards their spelling test.

Introduction

Southwold Primary is a larger-than-average primary school located in Hackney. The school is rated Ofsted outstanding, with most children progressing above the national average. It is an ethnically diverse school with a much higher percentage of EAL children than the national average. Saracho (2017) states: "Young children whose culture and language differ from those in the school encounter functional language difficulties, such as differences in using language to communicate for various purposes". Therefore, ensuring that children at Southwold have the most effective literacy provision is paramount.

Spelling is one of the fundamental parts of the writing process as it lays the foundation for effective written communication skills. By learning to spell words accurately, young learners gain the ability to express their thoughts and ideas clearly and coherently. Mastering spelling improves reading abilities and enhances phonemic awareness, enabling children to understand the sound-letter relationships in language. Moreover, spelling proficiency boosts students' confidence and motivation as they experience success in their writing endeavours. It cultivates attention to detail, promoting a sense of responsibility and pride in their work.

An educational blog further emphasises the importance of spelling in primary school when it states:

"Aside from the statutory requirements, learning to spell well is extremely useful if we want children to become confident writers. If they are constantly stopping to think about how words are spelled while they write, it can interrupt the flow of their thoughts, taking them away from what we want them to be thinking about: their choice of words and how they construct those words into sentences that communicate exactly what they want to say." (Oxford Primary, 2016)

At Southwold Primary, spelling is taught through weekly spellings being taught and then tested once a week. The children are given the spellings to take home and are encouraged to practise before the test. It is also the expectation that the teacher explicitly teaches the weekly spelling pattern and that the children practise the spellings in handwriting sessions. In year one, the teaching of spellings goes alongside the phonics teaching and weekly spellings link to phonics lessons. As spellings were a focus this year, the whole school spelling tracker was introduced, where teachers update weekly with children's scores. This ensured it was easy to measure children's progress over each week and half term. It was clear at the beginning of the study that although the teaching of spelling was in place, a high percentage of children scored below seven. The study, therefore, aimed to give children targeted support to improve their weekly spelling. Additionally, research shows that children all learn differently. (Brooks and Weeks, 1999) thus, the spelling interventions needed to take on a multisensory approach.

The class teachers selected a group of children who they deemed would benefit most from the intervention were selected, and they received the spelling intervention every day. The progress of these children was then analysed through their spelling scores weekly and samples of their writing. The progress in spelling as a whole class was also analysed throughout the study. The class teachers involved in the study were also interviewed to give their opinions on the children's overall progress and confidence when spelling.

Potential limitations were identified. Spellings are designed to be practised mainly at home. Although this study puts more emphasis on in-class practice and rehearsal - the level of engagement at home will undoubtedly affect children's progress in spelling. Moreover, as all children have different learning styles and needs, the approaches chosen might not have been best suited to each child, so it could potentially have limitations. The attendance of some children can also have an effect on results as a few of the children involved in the study and regular absences.

Research Process

The spelling practice took place every day for five minutes at the beginning of the literacy lesson. Twice a week, the whole class participated in this. For the other three days, interventions were targeted for the group of children selected for the study. This group of children were continually scoring below seven, with many scoring below five, so it was clear that the spelling provision in place was not working for these children. Thus, the idea of the spelling intervention is that it would provide these children with extra spelling sessions where they can practice in a range of different ways. The children complete their spelling test on a Wednesday and would get the new words on a Thursday. The intervention would follow this pattern to ensure children regularly practised spellings (Fig. 1). To ensure consistency, teaching assistants were provided with packs containing the below plan and all resources were included.

Fig. 1

| |
|---|
| Monday- Spelling pattern in different colour. Eg snail pain- focus children only |
| Tuesday- Back tracing in pairs and saying aloud letters. - whole class |
| Wednesday- Practise on whiteboards-look, say, cover, write check whole class |
| Thursday- Rainbow writing- focus children only |
| Friday- Stampers- focus children only |

The research process lasted for three half terms and took place every day. The intervention was run by the class teacher for the whole class sessions and the teaching assistant for the small focus group. Teachers and teaching assistants were given training on how this intervention should be run and were provided with packs with all resources needed to ensure consistency in all classes involved. Teachers were provided with flip charts for the whole class sessions to ensure consistency (Fig 2). Regular discussions about the children's progress and the structure of the intervention took place to ensure it could be adapted to meet the needs of the children in the group.

Wednesday SPAG starter Spellings

Write your spelling words on your whiteboard. Use the look, cover, write check method.

| | | |
|----------|-------|--|
| 🏆 | ★ | |
| old | bike | |
| cold | like | |
| told | time | |
| hold | shine | |
| child | five | |
| children | slide | |
| sure | kite | |
| floor | floor | |
| poor | poor | |
| door | door | |

Tuesday SPAG starter Spellings

Use your finger to write your spellings on the back of your partner. Say the sounds aloud while you write.

| | | |
|----------|-------|--|
| 🏆 | ★ | |
| old | bike | |
| cold | like | |
| told | time | |
| hold | shine | |
| child | five | |
| children | slide | |
| sure | kite | |
| floor | floor | |
| poor | poor | |
| door | door | |

Although the main focus of the study was to assess the impact on children's spelling scores, it also aimed to explore how the intervention affected children's confidence with spelling overall and their ability to apply spelling patterns to written work moving forward. Therefore, teachers and children involved in the study were interviewed to get an overall picture. The interview questions allowed the study to take on different perspectives and not be solely based on the data gathered.

Findings

It was evident from the outset of the project that it positively impacted the children's spelling scores. The data showed that across all classes, there was an overall improvement in spelling scores. The spellings were recorded weekly on a whole school tracker where the teacher enters each child's weekly score. The box is then colour coded depending on the score. (10 is green, 9 and 8 are orange, and 7 and below are coloured red). This allows progress to be seen at a glance (see Appendix 1. to see overall scores).

Additionally, most of the focus children significantly improved from their starting points. See a sample of focus children below:

| Child | Baseline-Average score for Autumn 2 | Average score for Spring 1 | Average score for Spring 2 | Average score for Summer 1 |
|---------|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Child A | 3 | 5 | 8 | 8 |
| Child B | 2 | 3 | 6 | 7 |
| Child C | 4 | 4 | 8 | 9 |
| Child D | 3 | 6 | 7 | 7 |
| Child E | 3 | 7 | 8 | 8 |
| Child F | 2 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| Child G | 3 | 5 | 8 | 9 |
| Child H | 2 | 4 | 5 | 8 |

It is clear from the evidence that the children progressed from the starting point and became more confident with using the various strategies. Teachers noted that the more children improved in spellings, the more they became motivated to practise spellings at home. The gradual increase of scores each week from most of the focus children indicated that through regular practice using different strategies, children were developing their ability to learn the spellings. From book looks and teacher discussions, it was clear that a more pronounced emphasis on spellings using a multisensory approach enabled children to become more confident in applying spellings in written work. One teacher stated: "I have noticed child H was a lot more confident and keen in spelling lessons and when completing spelling tests as their scores were improving". Another teacher stated that child A's spelling improved overall, and she could use and apply phonics sounds in her written work." As a whole, the teachers all agreed that the intervention had a positive impact on children's spelling overall as well as their test scores. When having discussions with children, they also stated that they used the spelling strategies to practise spellings at home, which would support their spelling scores. It has also to be considered that throughout the year, there has been a more considerable emphasis on spellings in class and the introduction of spelling stickers. This has impacted children's motivation around spellings and willingness to practise at home, which evidently has impacted children's spelling scores and spelling overall. It also had to be considered that the varying levels of home support would affect children's spelling scores overall.

Impact and Conclusion

It is conclusive that this study positively impacted the children's spelling scores, overall spelling accuracy in written work and children's attitude to spellings. It was clear from the data that there was a great improvement in the spelling scores of the key children involved in the study and across KS1 as a whole. All teachers involved in the study stated that it positively impacted children's confidence in spelling tests and writing overall. It also supported children to be more likely to spell spelling words correctly in subsequent written work. Overall, the focus on spellings across KS1 raised the profile of weekly spellings, and as a whole, the spelling scores over KS1 improved since the beginning of the year. The targeted practice in a multisensory way ensured all focus children progressed from their starting points. It is essential that moving forward, it is standard practice that children are given the time and opportunities in class to learn and practise their spellings. It is also essential to ensure that there are interventions or support in place for key children who find spelling more of a challenge or who do not have the support at home. As previously mentioned, children involved in the study stated that they were using the spelling strategies used in class to practise spellings at home, so it could also be recommended that a list of manageable but multisensory spelling strategies are shared with KS1 parents at the beginning of the year. To conclude, this study has had a positive impact, and it is something that, with consideration, would be beneficial for KS1 to keep in place as standard practice.

Appendices

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 5 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 3 |
| 0 | 3 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 6 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 4 | 3 |
| 8 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 0 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 5 | 2 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 2 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 |
| 0 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 0 | 9 | 2 | 2 | 6 | 10 |
| 0 | 3 | 7 | 8 | 5 | |
| 3 | 0 | 3 | 6 | 3 | |
| 0 | 0 | 1 | 8 | 7 | absent |
| 0 | 7 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| 0 | 1 | 3 | 10 | 6 | |
| 4 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 9 |
| 3 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 9 | 9 |
| 3 | 8 | 6 | 5 | absent | 6 |
| 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| 2 | 1 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| 7 | 0 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 7 |
| 1 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 7 | |
| 0 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 3 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 6 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 8 |
| 8 | 6 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| abs | abs | abs | abs | 0 | 2 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 1 | 8 |
| 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 7 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 8 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 8 | 7 |
| 8 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 8 | abs |
| 9 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 8 |
| 7 | abs | 3 | 6 | 6 | 7 |
| abs | abs | abs | abs | abs | abs |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 6 |
| 10 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 9 | 10 | 7 | 9 | 8 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 8 | 7 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 8 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| 6 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 8 |
| 9 | 8 | abs | 9 | 5 | 5 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 | Week 7 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 8 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 10 | Absent | 4 |
| 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | Absent | 10 |
| 5 | 10 | 9 | 9 | Absent | 5 | 2 |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 6 | 8 | 10 |
| 2 | 3 | 5 | Absent | Absent | 9 | 10 |
| 2 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | Absent |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 2 | 2 | 5 | Absent | 5 | 1 | 2 |
| 5 | 4 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 6 |
| 5 | 7 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 9 | 4 |
| 6 | 8 | 10 | 3 | 6 | 4 | Absent |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | Absent | 1 | Absent | 2 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| 1 | 0 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 7 | 4 | 6 | 10 | Absent | 6 | 9 |
| 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 5 | 5 | Absent | 6 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| 7 | 9 | 8 | 8 | Absent | 5 | 10 |
| 8 | 8 | 8 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 3 |
| 1 | 0 | 3 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 2 |
| 0 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 4 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 10 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 9 | 10 | 7 | 8 | Absent | 8 |
| 7 | 5 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 7 |
| 8 | 10 | Absent | 8 | Absent | 8 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| 9 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 5 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 7 | 7 | 6 | 10 | 6 | Absent |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 8 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 4 |
| 6 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 8 |
| 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 5 |
| 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| 1 | 6 | 3 | 6 | Absent | Absent |
| 6 | 0 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 5 |
| n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| 7 | Absent | Absent | 6 | Absent | Absent |
| 7 | 7 | 10 | Absent | 3 | 8 |
| 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 | Week 7 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 5 | 7 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 3 | 5 |
| 8 | 5 | 10 | 3 | 10 | 5 | ABS |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 6 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | ABS | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 5 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 6 | ABS |
| 6 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 7 | 8 |
| 2 | 6 | 7 | ABS | 10 | 8 | |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | ABS | 10 | 9 | 10 |
| 6 | 10 | ABS | 6 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | ABS | 6 | 10 | ABS | 9 |
| 6 | 9 | 10 | 6 | 10 | 10 | 6 |
| ABS | 5 | 5 | 0 | 1 | ABS | |
| 5 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 6 |
| 10 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 5 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | ABS | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 2 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 8 | 9 |
| 8 | 8 | 10 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 8 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 8 |
| 10 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 9 | ABS | 9 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 8 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 6 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| ABS | 10 | ABS | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 7 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 8 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | ABS | 10 | 10 |
| 7 | 9 | 9 | 10 | ABS | 9 |
| 7 | 7 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 8 |
| 5 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| 7 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | ABS | 10 | 10 |
| 8 | ABS | 9 | 10 | 7 | 7 |
| 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 5 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 10 | ABS |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|------------|------------|------------|--------|------------|
| 0 | 0 | 8 | 2 | 5 | 5 |
| absent | 3 out of 5 | 0 out of 5 | 3 out of 5 | absent | 2 out of 5 |
| 9 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 8 | 8 |
| 9 | 7 | 9 | 5 | absent | 7 |
| 10 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 0 | 6 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 0 | 3 | 5 | 0 | 7 | 4 |
| 9 | 7 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| 10 | 7 | 8 | 2 | absent | absent |
| absent | absent | 7 | 6 | 10 | 7 |
| N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 8 | 10 | 9 | 6 | 8 | 8 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| 8 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 9 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 7 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 7 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 9 |
| 10 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 |

| Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 | Week 6 |
|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| 9 | 10 | 2 | 6 | 10 | 10 |
| 8 | 9 | 5 | absent | 10 | 8 |
| 6 | 6 | 3 | 7 | 10 | 10 |
| absent | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| absent | absent | 10 | 8 | 8 | 7 |
| 9 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 10 | 9 |
| 6 | 10 | absent | 9 | 3 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | absent | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 5 | 9 | 3 | 10 |
| N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| 10 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| absent | 9 | 8 | 5 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| absent | 7 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 |

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