

What impact does the implementation of a structured and consistent introduction and rehearsal of the weekly spellings have on the progress of all learners?

Southwold Primary School, KS2 Phase

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore whether the implementation of a focused and structured introduction to weekly spellings had an impact on pupils' spelling attainment and application in tests and wider writing.

In KS2 it has been observed how gaps in pupil knowledge of spelling patterns has affected them when taking their end of year assessment in Year 6. Ensuring spelling sessions are implemented consistently and with rigour is imperative to ensuring accuracy and age related attainment. The aim of the research was to provide pupils and teachers with a consistent approach that would help support and close the gaps for a range of learners and abilities.

Introduction

Spelling is at the core of being a successful writer and is integral to instilling a secure knowledge of the English language. Ofsted's 'Research and Review: English' updated in July 2022, explains that spelling should be taught 'explicitly'. Furthermore, the national curriculum says 'Fluency in the English language is an essential foundation for a success in all subjects'.

Previously, pupils were given weekly spellings, however there was no consistent opportunity for them to learn definitions, spelling rules or apply the word in context. This impacted spelling scores and limited pupils' use of the words in their wider writing. Through pupil voice, it was also evident that some pupils did not always know the meaning of the word.

For this study, it was important that the profile of spelling was raised across KS2 and was part of the day-to-day learning environment e.g., displayed on the wall and integrated into literacy lessons. The strategies for the introduction and rehearsals of weekly spellings were broken down to cater for a range of learners (oral rehearsal, context, visuals and writing). The aim of this was to ensure that all pupils were able to access the session. Also the oral rehearsal in a range of contexts helped support pupils apply their spellings in wider writing.

Research Process

The research process was carried out by the phase leader and involved a total of eight teachers and classes from Year 3 to 6.

Each week there was a focus on a spelling rule with the exception of Year 6 who split weekly spellings between spelling rules and words from the Year 5/6 spelling list in order to prepare them for their SATs exams.

Once the format of the session was agreed upon, it was then necessary to consider when the session would take place. In order to avoid confusion, it was decided that it would be after the weekly spelling test and when the new spellings would be given out. The structure of the session was consistent across the phase so that the impact could be measured fairly, (Fig. 1,2,3 and 4).

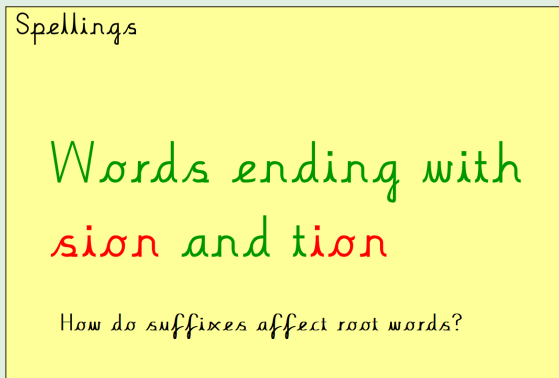


Fig. 1 Slide 1 of session (introduction to the rule)

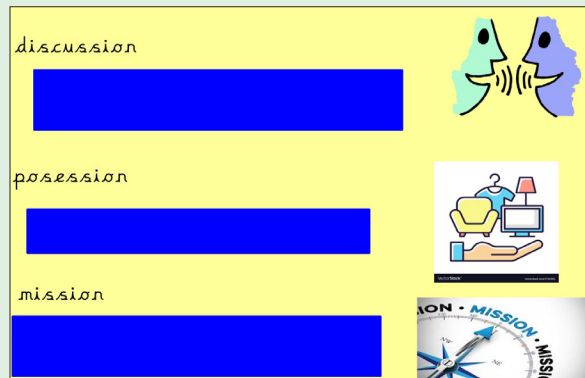


Fig. 2 Slide 2 - an example of word, meaning, visual

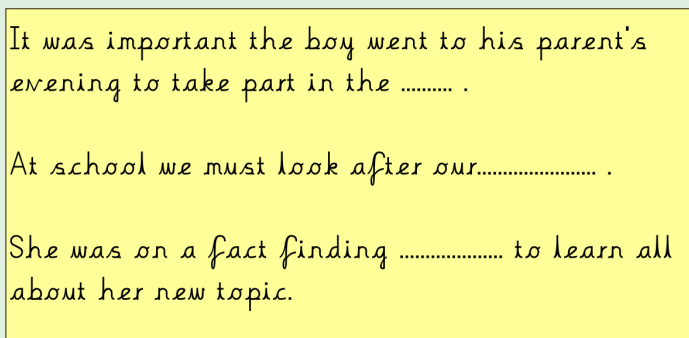


Fig. 3 Slide 3 - applying the word in a context.

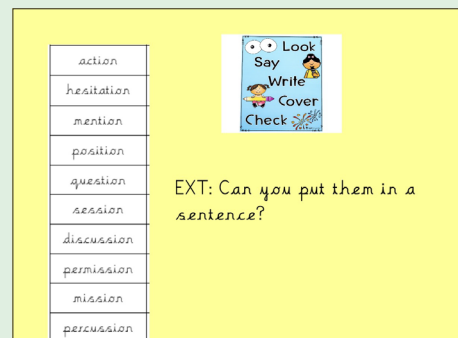


Fig. 4 Slide 4 - providing opportunity to 'look, say, write'.

It is important to note that although the aims were to provide a session accessible to all learners, the identified lowest 20% (identified through the baseline assessment) were being given additional targeted interventions alongside the lesson from the member of support staff. The structure of this depended on the individual needs of the learners.

The session ran for approximately 20-25 minutes, however teachers were able to utilise the ActiveInspire flipchart throughout the week for short revision sessions. The idea was that the session was taught consistently and kept at a high profile rather than being forgotten about. As such, consistency was imperative in making sure this was a purposeful and successful study. To support this, time was set-aside in weekly phase meetings to discuss any barriers or successes and advise teachers where necessary.

To measure outcomes, teachers input weekly spelling scores into a tracker (see appendices for baseline and final session scores). Progress was further measured through book looks (spelling books and wider writing), session observations and pupil and teacher voice.

Finding

Initial outcomes from the data show an increase in pupils scoring 9 or 10 out of 10 in their weekly tests. In some instances scores increased by 7-8 marks. The improvement in scores was consistent and initial non-movers were quickly addressed and supported.

Through pupil interviews and session observations, it was clear that the profile of spellings had been raised and ingrained in different aspects of their routine and lessons. Teachers were also confidently addressing any misconceptions around spelling rules and/or meanings of words.

All pupils were able to show where the weekly spellings were displayed and could talk about the session and how it supported them. Pupils showed they had an improved understanding of the meanings of words, which they explained helped them remember how to spell them through connecting them with a context.

Teachers expressed that they felt more confident teaching spellings with clear structure and expectations. They commented that the increased profile of spellings meant that pupils took pleasure in finding different ways to incorporate the words in their wider writing. For example a group of Year 6 pupils created a game where they would write a 'nonsense' story including all the weekly spelling words in the correct context.

An unexpected finding was that pupils seemingly took greater care of their spelling books and there was an increase in positive praise and stickers encouraging progress. When looking at writing, pupils were continuing to use words from previous spelling lessons in the correct context.

Impact and Conclusion

On reflection, the impact could have been even greater if the intervention group, for the lowest 20%, took place more frequently acting as short 'booster' sessions.

Nonetheless, this research has shown that the implementation of a weekly introduction and rehearsal of spellings has significant impact on pupils' scores and their confidence in embedding such words in their wider writing and spoken vocabulary. Furthermore, the structure of the session provided teachers with clear strategies for teaching spellings to all pupils creating greater teacher confidence.

Next steps would be to ensure that teachers are consistently and explicitly embedding spellings words in pupils' wider writing and in modelled writes. This would allow for effective consolidation of the weekly spellings. As well, ensuring that spellings remain high profile and targeted interventions continue for identified pupils. For pupils to be regularly exposed to spellings, alongside visuals, and provided with the context of words as well as oral rehearsal, is integral to making an impact and in turn supporting them to be confident and successful spellers.

Appendices

	Percentage of pupils scoring 10/10 before research	Percentage of pupils scoring 10/10 at the end of the research
Year 3	15%	58%
Year 4	0%	77%
Year 5	9%	68%
Year 6	40%	95%

References

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