

Welcome to



In school, we're teaching spelling using an investigative approach called Word study. This way of teaching focuses on making links between what the children have learned about how to read words, with what they need to think about in order to spell them.

We are enthusiastic about this interactive approach to teaching and learning about words, because we are able to develop opportunities for the children to make links between sounds, patterns and meanings in words. The children also spend time generating and testing their own theories about how and why words are spelled; and work in an interactive environment which promotes vocabulary development and enrichment. This, in turn, has a positive effect on their reading comprehension and their writing skills.

We hope this leaflet helps you understand a bit about the approach and the things you can do to support it at home.

What is it?

Word study builds on knowledge about words which the children have. It helps them to develop critical thinking, word observation skills, discussion and spelling patterns and meanings; developing a knowledge of words and how they work pulls together skills we know work in other learning environments, and uses language in meaningful contexts.

How does it work?

Word study teaches pupils the skills they need to look in detail at words. Lessons are based around talk and discussion activities which promote children's observation and use of words. As well as being very actively involved in their learning, pupils are given tools and techniques to learn how to learn about spelling, rather than remembering lists. As they develop through school, pupils' understanding of the way words work progresses from a sounds or phonics based approach, through an appreciation of how patterns in language, to a deeper understanding of the ways in which the meanings of words and their component parts add structure to the words themselves.

Word study investigations begin with noticing simple similarities and differences between words, and progress to children developing their own opinions about why words follow certain patterns, based on their observations. Many of these investigations are based around word sort activities, where the children classify words according to observable features. Pupils use terminology they are familiar with from phonics lessons to do this.

Following on from these investigations, pupils are given challenges to test the patterns they have noticed. These challenges enable children to develop their use of the spelling patterns by using and applying them in a variety of contexts. Once these are established, the spelling patterns and rules are reinforced in lessons where possible, to consolidate learning. The challenges also support the development and enrichment, creating a word aware learning culture which has an enormously positive impact on reading and writing development at all levels.

ave already acquired through phonics teaching, and expands
d reading skills. The children use the skills to describe words,
and the way they work as they do so. It's exciting because it
and develops opportunities for children to talk about words and



What about the statutory word lists?

There are always going to be some words that just need to be learned; but Word Study teaches children that over 80% of our words follow predictable patterns. Where words do need to be learned by rote, a familiarity with word study techniques helps children to focus on the structure of irregular words. In addition, the ability to talk about and discuss the ways in which irregular spellings differ from expected patterns helps children to learn and remember those lists more effectively.



Assessment

Children are assessed against their ability to use a spelling pattern rather than against a list of learned words. The emphasis is on looking for and identifying patterns, and particularly on using words in context so they are remembered more easily.

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How can you help at home?



Your child's teacher will give them specific instructions about appropriate activities but these are some general guidelines for Word Study home discussions.

Use the Word Observation sheet to help you talk about the features of words that the children are spelling. You'll be using words like vowel, digraph and syllable: this technical word vocabulary has huge importance in children being word aware.

Your focus is

to look for a pattern based on the sounds in the words, for example words with a short vowel sound have two consonants before a suffix (planning), while words with long vowels have only one consonant before the suffix (planing). Your child should be able to explain the spelling pattern or rule to you.

Further up the school, your child should be able to talk about the meanings of parts of words and how this helps predict the spelling and the particular use of the word in its written context. The Challenge picture to the right will help you with discussions about how and why words are used.

