State Literacy Strategy

Focus on literacy: Spelling
Foreword

In 1997 the Department of Education and Training published Focus on literacy, which was a position paper on the teaching of literacy. Its purpose was to explain the main features of the NSW State Literacy Strategy. Since then, many more documents have been issued to support teachers in implementing the literacy strategy.

Focus on literacy: Spelling is the latest of these. Its purpose is to describe the key elements of the Department’s policy on the teaching of spelling, from Kindergarten through to Year 12.

Teachers are encouraged to teach spelling in the same explicit and systematic way that they teach all other literacy skills and understandings. In fact, the key elements of teaching spelling are similar to the key elements of the State Literacy Strategy. The expectations are:

• The knowledge, skills and strategies of spelling will be taught in an explicit and systematic way.
• All students will learn to spell.
• Correct spelling will be valued and emphasised in students’ writing in all subjects.
• Students will correctly spell commonly used words appropriate to their stage of development.
• A balanced spelling program will include understanding spelling generalisations or rules and using a dictionary.
• The development of all students’ spelling will be monitored in a consistent way.
• Students who are experiencing spelling difficulties will be identified early and will be given appropriate support.
• A planned, whole-school approach will ensure continuity in the development of each student’s knowledge and understandings about spelling.
• Effective learning partnerships will be developed with parents and caregivers.
• Teachers will be given support for effective practice in the teaching and learning of spelling.

In the foreword to Focus on literacy I referred to “the profoundly important work our teachers are doing in building a literate society”. Spelling is a significant aspect of this work, because the ability to spell is a highly visible sign of a person’s level of literacy.

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June 1998
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Introduction

This document is of relevance to all teachers in all subject areas, from Kindergarten to Year 12. It recognises that learning to spell is a lifelong process that consists of accumulating knowledge about the spelling of English words.

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of number and basic mathematical signs and symbols within text.

Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing. Effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime.

Australia's Language and Literacy Policy, Companion Volume to the Policy Paper, 1991

Speaking, listening, reading, writing and critical thinking provide the context in which students acquire the knowledge, understandings, skills and strategies which they need in order to spell. When they write, students apply the knowledge and understandings they have learnt about how to spell words.

Learning to write well involves learning to spell. Writing creates the need for spelling. The purposes of spelling are the purposes of language itself, that is:

• to make meaning, and
• to share meaning in a way that is clearly understood by readers.
Spelling is functional. That is, it is a system for making meaning. Spelling is also social, its purpose being to enable readers to construct meaning. Correct or standard spelling assists the reader. Language communities determine what the correct spelling is.

The value of correct spelling is that it gives writing credibility and therefore reaches a wider audience. Correct spelling helps writers to communicate across the boundaries of dialect and pronunciation.

For many students, learning to spell is a complex process that involves them in the act of problem-solving about how to spell accurately the words they want to use. While engaging in this process they need to draw on the knowledge they have acquired about how words are spelt.

Recent developments in technology, such as spelling checker software, have not replaced the need for writers to understand how to spell words correctly. Such technology assists in proofreading, but is not a substitute for spelling knowledge.

Many factors can influence whether a student produces correct spelling, including:

- the purpose for writing
- the context in which the writing is taking place
- the stage of development of the writer
- the stage of development of the written text itself
- the implied reader of the written text.

In the early stages of their language and spelling development, writers often use spellings that approximate conventional forms. They are typically moving from approximation to correct spelling. From the knowledge they have acquired, they invent ways to convey their message and gradually learn to use the conventional forms of spelling.

During these stages, in particular, it is important that teachers give students support and encouragement about how to spell unfamiliar words correctly.
There are about half a million words in the English language. Even though it uses 26 letters for about 44 sounds, many of its words are not spelt the way they sound. There are historical reasons for this.

English began as an Indo-European Teutonic dialect, but during the past millennium it has been subject to changes within the language itself, as well as the influences of many other languages.

The early form of English (or Anglo-Saxon) was more phonetically regular than Modern English. In the original English, grammatical meaning was heavily dependent on word endings: word order was less important. Some of these original features still remain (e.g. ox–oxen, man–men; mouse–mice). Over time, as word order assumed greater importance, many of the word endings dropped off. The silent e at the end of many English words is due to this change.

After the introduction of Christianity and the Norman invasion, large numbers of Latin and French words entered the language. Because the Anglo-Saxon language had many sounds that were not found in French, and also because French handwriting was different from that used by the Anglo-Saxons, some spelling compromises had to be made when writing the language down. For example, the latter phenomenon led to the introduction of the letter o in words like love, son, and women.

Regional variations in pronunciation have always been a feature of English. Consistency in spelling is a comparatively recent phenomenon. For example, as Anglo-Saxon moved towards Middle English and into Elizabethan times, many words with i and e vowels and the ae diphthongs changed. In Shakespeare’s time, for example, the word reason was pronounced “raisin” (as it still is in parts of the United Kingdom today), which is why Shakespeare indulges in a play on words with reasons and blackberries in Henry IV Part 1.
Since medieval times, English has acquired thousands of new words from a variety of sources. Many of these were derived from Latin and Greek, because of the Renaissance. Many were derived from the languages of communities colonised by Britain. Following the industrial revolution, many new words had to be made up.

When scientific knowledge was growing in the early modern age, Greek words were used as the basis for coining many new scientific words. The Greek alphabet has some letter sounds that the English alphabet does not have, such as phi, chi and psi. This accounts for the non-phonetic spelling of a host of English words, such as telephone, trachea and psychology.

With the invention of printing in the fifteenth century it became necessary to standardise the way in which words were spelt. Since then, the spelling of words has changed far less, although with the use of American spelling checkers on computers, there has been a pressure to Americanise the spelling of some words.

Understanding English spelling

Writers need to understand English spelling, in order to spell correctly.

English spelling is a system which integrates phonetic and morphemic patterns to produce meaning in writing. Understanding phonetic patterns enables writers to spell those words that have predictable sound-letter relationships, e.g. mat.

Morphemes are the smallest units of language that carry meaning. The phonemes /b/, /a/ and /t/ together form the morpheme /bat/. While the word bat carries some meaning, its particular meaning depends on the context of its use. For example, its meaning is different in each of the following:

“I bought a cricket bat.”
“She went in to bat.”
“The bat spread its wings.”
The ending -ing is also a morpheme, even though it carries meaning only when it is bound to a word like bat, to make batting. As you see, adding the -ing morpheme causes a change to the other morpheme, in this case the doubling of the end consonant. Fortunately, such morphemic changes are fairly regular in English, which is why understanding morphemic patterns is another important aspect of spelling knowledge. This is often the point of spelling “rules”.

Understanding these features of the English language helps writers to spell, because it is useful to remember that many of the words that are difficult to spell have non-phonetic spellings for a variety of reasons: their present spelling might reflect the way they were pronounced many years ago (the word knight is an example) or they might be borrowed from a foreign language (the word charade, from French, is an example).

Most of these features must be learnt as individual cases. There is no consistent approach to what the English language does with words borrowed from other languages. Either visual knowledge or etymological knowledge is used in these instances.

The best way to learn how to spell the common word two correctly is simply to learn that it looks like that, relying on visual knowledge.

On the other hand, the best way to learn how to spell psychology correctly is to learn that it starts with the Greek letter psi and has within it the other Greek letter chi, the same letter as in Christmas. This demonstrates the importance of etymological knowledge, not only for older students, but also for students at any stage of learning when they need to learn the spelling of a particular word.
Spelling knowledge

Phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological knowledge

The knowledge that students need if they are to become proficient spellers takes four different forms:

- phonological knowledge: how words and letter combinations sound
- visual knowledge: the way words and letter combinations look
- morphemic knowledge: the meaning of words and the way words take different spellings when they change form
- etymological knowledge: the derivations of words.

**Phonological knowledge focuses on how sounds correspond to letters.** It includes teaching students:

- the names of letters, the sounds they represent and the ways in which letters can be grouped to make different sounds e.g. vowels, consonants, consonant blends, word families like ound, itch, ock
- the concept of onset and rime, e.g. in the word pink, p is onset and ink is rime
- about how to segment the sounds in words into “chunks” of sound (phonemic awareness).

**Visual knowledge focuses on how words look.** It includes teaching students:

- to recall and compare the appearance of words, particularly those which they have seen or learnt before or those which are commonly used
- to recognise what letters look like and how to write them
- to recognise that letters can be grouped in particular ways, e.g. endings that frequently occur in words.
Morphemic knowledge focuses on the meaning of words and how they change when they take on different grammatical forms. It includes teaching students:

- how to use morphemes to assist them to spell words
- how compound words are constructed
- knowledge of suffixes and prefixes and the generalisations that can be made and the rules that can be generated about adding them to words.

Etymological knowledge focuses on the origins and meaning of non-phonetic words. It includes teaching students:

- about the roots of words and word meanings, origins and history
- that often particular clusters of letters that appear in words not only look the same but also are related in meaning, often because of their root, e.g. aquatic, aquatint, aquarium.

Understanding the importance of the four forms of knowledge and their relationship with the process of learning to spell has significant implications for teaching. Within the context of meaningful written language experiences, students need explicit teaching about the phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological aspects of spelling that are relevant to their stage of spelling development.

When they have access to this knowledge, students will be better able to spell unfamiliar words accurately for a variety of social and academic purposes.

Knowing about what words mean and:
- how words sound,
- how words look,
- how words change form, and
- where words come from
forms the basis of the strategies which writers use when working out how to spell words.
The most proficient speller will occasionally hear an unfamiliar, non-phonetic word, and might be unable to use visual, morphemic or etymological information to work out its correct spelling. At this point, the writer will use such strategies as asking someone else or looking up a dictionary. Generally, visual or etymological knowledge will help us find an unfamiliar non-phonetic word in a dictionary or choose a word in a spelling checker.

The explicit and systematic teaching of spelling knowledge, skills and strategies at all stages of spelling development will assist students in developing the ability to produce correct spelling consistently. As students progress in their levels of understanding about the purposes for writing and the ways in which the spelling system works, they will:

- increase the number and range of spelling strategies they use, and
- improve their ability to select, apply and integrate appropriate spelling strategies.

The identification of phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological knowledge and the part they play in helping students become better spellers has important implications for spelling instruction. At all stages students need explicit teaching about all four types of spelling knowledge, to ensure that they have a balanced repertoire on which to draw as they approach the spelling of both known and unknown words. Typically, proficient spellers have not only developed a range of spelling knowledge on which to draw, but are also able to integrate the spelling strategies they use.
Spelling and the school

Spelling in the different key learning areas

The functional view of language that underpins the State Literacy Strategy focuses on how people use language for different purposes and the relationship between language and meaning. This view has implications for the way in which reading, writing, talking and listening are taught in all key learning areas.

Students learn that if their writing is to be clearly understood, they need to spell words correctly. As students progress through primary school and into the early years of secondary school, learning is separated into key areas. Each of these key learning areas uses particular written, spoken and symbolic forms to present its knowledge. Thus each subject makes distinctive literacy demands upon students.

It is the responsibility of all teachers, primary and secondary, to value the correct spelling of all words in students’ writing. It is also important for teachers to identify the spelling demands of their learning areas and to teach students explicitly the specific vocabulary of their subjects and the spelling knowledge students need in order to spell this vocabulary correctly.

Teachers in all key learning areas need to provide students with access to the four types of spelling knowledge. For secondary teachers, this will often involve them in teaching etymological knowledge, e.g. the use of Greek roots in many scientific terms and the use of Italian words in music.
Enabling parents to help

A partnership between home and school provides a basis for building networks in which parents and teachers provide mutual support for children’s learning and literacy development.

Focus on literacy, 1997, p. 10

Parents observe the spelling approximations of their children and often wonder how they can help and how much they should correct their approximations.

To increase the value and effectiveness of the role that parents play in students’ spelling development, parents and teachers need to share information about each other’s literacy practices and expectations.

Developing common understandings about how spelling is taught and what is expected of students will ensure that there is consistency between home and school. This will help students to experience success with spelling. In particular, schools can assist by providing parents with access to the information that they need about children’s development in spelling.

Such information includes:

• how spelling is taught across the curriculum
• the outcomes in spelling expected of students at different stages
• the links between spelling and the other language modes of talking, listening, reading and writing
• the ways in which parents and caregivers can assist with spelling at home.

Parents should be encouraged to help their children with those aspects of spelling knowledge about which they feel confident. They should be encouraged to provide their children with dictionaries, both pocket size and larger, and consult them together when the need arises. At the same time, they should not hesitate simply to tell children the correct spelling of unfamiliar words when asked.
Whole-school focus on spelling

Within a whole-school focus on the teaching of literacy, it is expected that schools will emphasise the teaching and learning of spelling.

To support students’ continuous and sequenced growth as spellers and to promote improved outcomes, schools need to adopt a whole-school approach to teaching and assessing spelling. Schools should ensure that plans which focus on spelling are implemented as part of the literacy strand of the school’s annual management plan. These plans should be coordinated by the school’s literacy support team, in order to give students as many opportunities as possible to experience success in spelling.

A whole-school commitment to training teachers in understanding spelling and in teaching it in an explicit and systematic way will help teachers to apply these understandings in classrooms in all key learning areas. Evaluations of school plans will report on students’ achievements and help identify further action to be taken and areas where support is needed.

A coordinated whole-school approach in spelling also assists schools to be aware of the spelling outcomes expected of all students and to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all groups, including students, teachers, specialist teachers, members of the school executive and parents. In particular, it is expected that schools will encourage parents to participate with them in improving students’ spelling.
Teaching spelling

Explicit and systematic teaching of spelling

Improved literacy outcomes for all students are best achieved within a supportive and stimulating language environment where there is integration of reading, writing, talking and listening with critical thinking.

Focus on literacy, 1997, p. 13

Within an integrated language learning environment where learning to spell is closely linked to learning to talk, listen, read and write, students should be taught in a systematic and explicit way about the types of spelling knowledge that are appropriate to their writing purposes and stage of spelling development.

Systematic instruction as described in Focus on literacy has three important dimensions.

First, it involves the teacher having a clear understanding of what knowledge and skills need to be taught and a clear perception of when it is appropriate to teach particular skills.

Second, it requires the teacher to monitor systematically the need for certain skills to be taught.

Third, the instruction should not be left to chance.

The explicit and systematic teaching of spelling means that teachers need to provide, within an integrated language learning environment:

• a daily focus on spelling skills and strategies
• lessons where the purpose and value of the spelling instruction are made explicit to students
• teaching of phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological spelling knowledge

• teaching of the strategies that can be used when applying this knowledge

• frequent exposure to and experience with spelling activities in the context of talking, listening, reading and writing

• regular opportunities for students to demonstrate and reflect on their understandings about spelling

• explicit teaching of dictionary skills

• regular modelling of using dictionaries

• regular monitoring, analysis and feedback on spelling performance and progress

• explicit teaching and opportunities for students to practise the spelling of words used frequently and those which are essential vocabulary in key learning areas

• continuous development of spelling skills and strategies throughout the stages of schooling.

Although correct spelling should be the goal of all students at all stages of development, students characteristically use spelling approximations in the early stages. As students learn more, correct spelling should occur with greater frequency and consistency, as it becomes progressively easier and more automatic.

However, approximations of correct spelling can be an important indicator of the spelling knowledge that a student is using or still needs to be taught. Where appropriate, teachers should demonstrate spelling strategies that could be used or provide correct spelling.

To teach spelling effectively teachers need to understand:

• how the spelling system works

• how to give students access to the four types of knowledge which they need in order to spell words

• how to plan classroom spelling programs using the major teaching strategies of modelled, guided and independent spelling
• how spelling develops throughout all stages, as detailed in the English K-6 syllabus
• how spelling has links with all other aspects of language learning, particularly reading and writing
• how to cater for the spelling needs of a diversity of learners
• how to monitor and assess spelling development
• how to intervene early and assist students who are experiencing difficulties with spelling
• the importance of positive home-school partnerships in spelling
• the need for whole-school action regarding the teaching of spelling.

Effective spelling programs use a balance of modelled, guided and independent teaching strategies in the context of integrated talking, listening, reading and writing episodes to support and extend students as they learn to spell.

Modelled spelling

The teacher structures demonstrations of how to use visual knowledge, phonological knowledge, morphemic knowledge and etymological knowledge when spelling words. The teacher explicitly shares spelling knowledge with students by showing, explaining and instructing, while students watch, listen, engage, follow and respond.

Guided spelling

The teacher works with one student or a small group of students that have been grouped according to common spelling needs, determined by effective assessment procedures. Guided spelling is specifically focused instructional time. Teachers instruct, teach, scaffold, question, prompt, observe and monitor students’ spelling development, while students are expected to engage, solve problems, practise, take risks, self-correct and learn the correct spelling.
Independent spelling

The teacher constructs purposeful written language contexts in which students can apply, practise and integrate the knowledge which they have gained, particularly during modelled and guided spelling sessions. Teachers design, encourage, provide feedback, observe and record while students practise, initiate, select, use, record and evaluate their own spelling development.

During modelled and guided spelling sessions and independent written language experiences, teachers will encourage students to apply the four forms of spelling knowledge in a number of different ways, including:

- grouping words into lists
- using a dictionary and thesaurus efficiently
- developing handwriting and word processing skills
- using the spelling check function on the computer
- developing proofreading and editing skills
- developing visual memory techniques, e.g. the look-say-cover-write-check method
- keeping individualised personal dictionaries
- using mnemonics (memory triggers), e.g. piece of pie
- using analogy, e.g. knowing how to spell light means a student can generalise to spell lightly, lightness, lighten and enlighten and bright, sight, etc.

Spelling lists

Lists of words are useful in the teaching and learning of spelling when they are organised purposefully.

The most purposeful general lists are those organised according to the four forms of spelling knowledge, that is

- how words sound
- how words look
- how words change form, and
- where words come from.

These lists can be provided by the teacher as well as developed by students themselves. The following sorts of lists are therefore recommended:

Lists that reinforce phonological knowledge
e.g. regular sound-letter patterns, common letter sequences.

Lists that reinforce visual knowledge
e.g. common appearance, frequently occurring words.

Lists that reinforce morphemic knowledge
e.g. some spelling generalisations or rules like doubling consonants when adding “ing”.

Lists that reinforce etymological knowledge
e.g. subject-specific vocabulary, such as cookery terms from French (sauté, blanche), Classical roots, other languages.

Lists developed for specific purposes
e.g. words in particular subjects or for particular writing purposes; words that students have trouble spelling.

Teaching spelling should not consist merely of presenting students with lists of words without the explicit teaching of spelling knowledge. As they become proficient spellers, students learn how to spell many more words than they could learn merely through memorising “spelling lists”.

Focus on literacy: Spelling
Assessing spelling

Assessment is defined as “the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about students’ learning”. The central purpose of assessment is to provide information on student achievement and progress and set the direction for ongoing teaching and learning.

Principles for assessment and reporting in NSW Government schools, 1996

Assessment is integral to the teaching and learning of spelling. Effective assessment provides information about students’ spelling achievements and assists teachers to plan spelling programs necessary for students to make further progress.

Although assessment might take place informally in the classroom, it also needs to be planned systematically, to ensure that teachers monitor the progress of their students in spelling, using the outcomes appropriate to each stage as a basis for their teaching programs.

In addition to assessment tasks designed by teachers, information from the Year 3 and Year 5 Basic Skills tests can help teachers assess aspects of spelling. These tests provide information about students’ achievement in spelling and a reliable statewide standard of performance against which schools can analyse their results.

The Year 7 English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA) also provides information for secondary teachers about the spelling skills and understandings which students exhibit when they start secondary school. In the language test, students are required to identify incorrect spellings in texts, select correct spellings from a range of options and independently spell words correctly. Test results allow schools to focus on implementing appropriate strategies to ensure further development in all key learning areas.
The systematic assessment of spelling links assessment with teaching and learning in a continuous process which has the following components:

- collecting evidence about performance in spelling
- making judgements about this evidence
- planning learning experiences
- teaching spelling
- monitoring and recording achievements in spelling demonstrated by students
- reviewing teaching and learning programs.

To gain balanced information about students’ progress and achievement in spelling teachers need to collect a range of evidence on which to make judgements.

Observation forms the basis of most other assessment-gathering techniques in spelling. If teachers observe the spelling behaviours of their students in everyday reading and writing activities they will have useful assessment information. Bearing in mind the purpose and stage of development of a student’s writing, teachers should focus their observations by asking a question like this:

What does a particular pattern of approximation indicate, for example, when a student spells words like book as bk or bus as bs?
(They are matching the sounds they say and hear at the beginning and end of words with the sounds of initial and final consonants.)

Teachers can use some of the following methods to collect information, analyse behaviour and make judgements:

- observing spelling behaviours in modelled, guided and independent sessions
- analysing and keeping records of the spelling strategies which a student uses in guided spelling
- examining and analysing students’ writing samples to determine which types of spelling knowledge are being applied
• analysing results in the Basic Skills tests and ELLA tests

• using students’ self-assessment, such as independent spelling records

• examining performance on specifically designed tests, such as dictations and proofreading exercises, using words derived from modelled, guided and independent sessions.

Assessment and then reporting to parents will need to be undertaken as part of a whole-school approach in order to monitor and support students’ learning as they progress through the school and as they move from one key learning area to another.

Students experiencing difficulties with spelling should be identified and carefully assessed, and appropriate spelling programs need to be put in place to assist them. Such programs will be implemented and continuously monitored as the students progress through the school and as they learn in different key learning areas.
Learning spelling

Development of spelling in students

As students learn to write, their spelling demonstrates identifiable characteristics that can indicate different phases of development in spelling competence.

These characteristics of development in spelling can be seen in students’ writing by observing their spelling behaviours. For example:

- Discernible letters, numbers and symbols suggest that students are entering the beginning phases of learning to spell.

- One, two or three letters or first and last consonants representing a word indicate that students are starting to make connections between the letters of the alphabet and sounds.

- Increasing consistency in using letters to represent the sound patterns in words indicates that students are frequently matching letters to the sounds that they are hearing.

- Greater control over the correct spelling of high frequency words and an increasing awareness of visual and morphemic knowledge indicate that students are moving away from largely using phonological knowledge towards a wider use of other forms of spelling knowledge.

- Drawing upon all four sources of spelling knowledge, in an integrated way and automatically, indicates that students have developed a high level of spelling competence.
The development of these phases can be identified in students’ writing as they progress towards achievement of syllabus outcomes in all subjects and key learning areas.

The English K-6 Syllabus 1998 provides outcome statements that describe a framework of language learning for all students in talking and listening and reading and writing. It is expected that most students will achieve these outcomes by the end of each stage.

The writing strand includes a specific spelling outcome for each stage. Spelling indicators in the substrands “learning to read and write” and “learning about reading and writing” provide examples of how students might demonstrate achievement of reading and writing outcomes.

Students’ experiences in reading and writing provide opportunities to develop skills and understandings in spelling. The inclusion of spelling indicators in the syllabus substrands of learning to … and learning about … show the importance of providing learning experiences that enable students to acquire and apply the skills and understandings of spelling in both reading and writing.

**Diversity of students**

 Language learners have some characteristics that make them similar and some that make them different from one another. It is important for teachers to think about the similarities and differences of the students in their classes. Attention to the diverse needs of students enriches all teaching and learning experiences.

English K-6 modules, Board of Studies, 1998, p. 7

It is the responsibility of schools to address the needs of the diverse learners in their school. Teachers are responsible for selecting and sequencing effective teaching strategies that build on what students can do and explicitly teach spelling knowledge and skills to ensure that all students use correct spelling.
Teachers can use the following strategies to support students as they learn how to spell:

• scaffolding students through different aspects of written language tasks
• providing explicit instruction about phonological, visual, morphemic and etymological knowledge
• conferencing with students to help identify the knowledge on which they will draw when learning new words
• ensuring that content is age-appropriate
• providing frequent modelling of how to spell in the context of writing
• providing more frequent teaching and opportunities to practise
• locating students in the classroom in places that best suit their needs, e.g. ensuring that students with hearing problems sit near and face the teacher
• providing guided instruction to individuals or small groups, and
• helping students prioritise the words that they need to learn.

Students experiencing difficulties with spelling

Schools have a responsibility to address the needs of all students, including those with spelling difficulties. Teachers should monitor students’ development in spelling regularly and intervene early when students are not making the progress expected. Systematic school-wide tracking of those students who require significant and continual intervention is essential if these students are to improve.

Students experiencing difficulties with spelling will need additional support and explicit teaching to assist them to gain the knowledge, skills and strategies they need in order to become effective spellers. Not all students will experience the same spelling difficulties. It is therefore essential that teachers gather a range of information on which to make
their judgements about the spelling needs of specific students.

Students with similar needs can then be grouped for explicit teaching, practice and feedback.

Guided spelling sessions provide the most significant opportunity for classroom teachers to work with students experiencing spelling difficulties, assisted by support teachers (learning difficulties). Guided spelling sessions involve planned instruction that has been carefully matched and sequenced to meet the specific spelling needs of the group. Guided instruction in this way allows for greater levels of individualisation and closer monitoring of students’ progress with spelling.

In addition to guided spelling sessions, students experiencing difficulties need to participate with the rest of the class in modelled spelling, where they see and share in structured demonstrations. They also need opportunities to engage in independent spelling tasks, where they apply and practise the spelling knowledge and strategies previously learnt in modelled and guided sessions.
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| **Compound word** | A word consisting of two or more words that has a meaning different from that of the individual words, e.g. farmyard.  
(English K-6 Syllabus p. 93) |
| **Etymological knowledge** | Knowledge about the origins, history and roots of words in relation to word meaning, e.g. aquatic, aquatint, aquarium share a meaning relationship because of their root. |
| **Functional view of language** | The view that recognises language as a social phenomenon. Language consists of a range of resources for making meaning in various cultural and situational contexts. Sometimes called a social view of language. |
| **Inflections** | Word endings that indicate grammatical functions, such as the use of -s to indicate plural. In modern English, most grammatical functions are indicated by word order rather than inflections. |
| **Mnemonic** | Personalised memory cue, e.g. The station-er sells stationery.  
(English K-6 Syllabus p. 96) |
| **Morphemic knowledge** | Knowledge about how morphemes affect the meaning and spelling of words. Morphemes are the smallest units of language that carry meaning in a word and can be combined with other morphemes or base words to change meaning, e.g. un (morpheme) necessary (base word); hand (morpheme) bag (morpheme). |
| **Onset and rime** | The separate sounds in a word, i.e. the beginning part of the word (onset) and the rest of the word (rime), e.g. b-ark. |
| **Phonemic awareness** | The ability to attend to and segment the sound stream into “chunks” of sound, e.g. phonemes, syllables, onset/rime.  
(English K-6 Syllabus p. 97) |
Phonological knowledge
Knowledge about the sounds of language and the relationship between sounds and letters.

Prefix
Word parts that are attached to the beginning of base words to change the meaning, e.g. unhappy (see also suffix).
(English K-6 Syllabus p. 97)

Root
A word or morpheme which is the basic unit of meaning, to which other words or morphemes are added. For example, kind is the root word, to which the prefix un- is added, to form its opposite.
Also refers to a word borrowed from a foreign language and used as the basis of English words. For example, the Greek word gnosis (meaning knowledge) is the root of the English word diagnosis.

Rules
Generalisations made about patterns that develop in relation to changes to the spelling of words, e.g. adding the morpheme ing to bat causes a change to the other morpheme (batting).

Spelling
The system which integrates phonetic and morphemic patterns to produce meaning in writing. Also refers to a writer's ability to use standard or correct spelling.

Suffix
Word parts that are attached to the end of base words to change the meaning, e.g. happiness (see also prefix).
(English K-6 Syllabus p. 97)

Visual knowledge
Knowledge about the way words look that involves recognising, comparing and recalling the appearance of words.
Department of Education and Training

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*Meeting the challenge: literacy*

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