Supporting your child's learning – Spelling in K-6

NSW Board of Studies website -

Spelling is valued in our society. Teachers aim to help children understand that spelling correctly helps to communicate meaning. At school, spelling is taught as children learn to read and write. Children develop confidence when they 'have a go' at spelling words in their writing.

Learning to spell is a complex process which takes place over the stages of schooling.

Stage 1 – In Kindergarten to Year 2 children learn gradually to:
- recognise that language is broken into words
- recognise that words consist of sounds
- recognise the first letter of their name
- recognise the sounds for the letters of the alphabet
- write their name
- trace letters and words
- copy letters and words
- write the sounds that they hear in words
- use some common letter patterns, eg c-a-t, s-u-n, b-i-g
- use their visual memory of words, eg the LOOK, SAY, COVER, WRITE, CHECK method
- clap syllables in words
- spell some common words accurately in their own writing, eg colour words, days of the week, months of the year and topic/theme words
- try to spell words that are new to them
- develop word banks of word families such as bee, see, tree, three, green, heel
- identify and attempt to correct spelling errors, eg k-a-t/c-a-t
- use word banks, theme words and picture dictionaries.

Stage 2 – In Years 3 and 4 children learn gradually to:
- use their visual memory of words, eg the LOOK, SAY, COVER, WRITE, CHECK method
- use their auditory memory of words, eg say the sounds of the word and match them to the letters as they write them
• spell many commonly used words accurately
• develop personal spelling lists from their writing
• use their knowledge of letter patterns to spell unknown words, eg -tion, -ough
• break words into syllables, eg hos-pit-al
• use their knowledge of word families to spell words, eg ai, ay, er, ur, oi, oy, ouy
• correct some words that do not look right when they first write them
• use some spelling rules, eg - 'i' before 'e' except after 'c', eg believe, receive - change 'y' to 'i' and add 'es', eg family, families - double the final consonant after a short vowel sound when adding 'ing' or 'ed', eg run-running, hop-hopped
• use junior dictionaries and encyclopedias.

Stage 3 – In Years 5 and 6 children learn gradually to:
• spell most common words correctly
• use visual strategies such as recognition of letter patterns and critical features of words such as silent letters, eg cough
• use their knowledge of word parts to spell unfamiliar words such as prefixes, eg ambi-, bene-; suffixes, eg -age, -ant, -ful
• use their knowledge of word meanings to assist spelling, eg medicine - medical
• use uncommon letter patterns, eg psy-chiatrist, cz-ech,
• use apostrophes to show possession, eg the girl's bike
• use apostrophes to indicate contractions, eg couldn't, they'd
• use their knowledge of spelling rules to spell correctly; for instance, if a word ends in an 'f' change the 'f' to 've' before adding 's', eg knife - knives
• carefully proofread final drafts of their writing, correcting their spelling
• use spelling and punctuation of standard Australian English
• use dictionaries and a variety of resources to assist them to spell correctly.

How you can support your child in learning to spell
• say speech rhymes and tongue twisters together
• play 'detective' games with words. Ask your child to be a detective and find:
  - words that rhyme, eg can, fan, man, tan
  - words that begin with the same sound, eg sun, sausage, sea
  - words that end with the same sound, eg hat, street
  - little words in big words, eg 'am' in 'jam'
- words that sound the same but are spelt differently, eg ate - eight, to - two - too, their - there

- play word games that focus on the sounds of words, eg Junior Scrabble, Boggle, Word Snap, Wonderwords, Junior Crosswords, I Spy, Hangman

- encourage your child to write words that start with a particular sound

- encourage your child to write words with three letters, five letters and so on

- try to make spelling activities enjoyable

- encourage your child to 'have a go' at spelling words

- encourage your child to 'sound out' words, eg h-i-t, s-a-n-d

- ask your child to write words that are not easily 'sounded out', eg home, watch, after

- encourage your child to develop memory tricks such as 'a piece of pie', 'hear with your ear'

- encourage your child to use the LOOK SAY COVER WRITE CHECK method to spell a variety of words, eg ask your child to:
  - LOOK closely at the word
  - SAY the word and then
  - COVER it
  - WRITE the word and then
  - CHECK to see if it is correct!

- 'hear' your child's personal spelling lists

- show your child how to use dictionaries, encyclopedias and thesauruses

Provide positive feedback when your child attempts to spell a word and/or spells a word correctly. See your child's class teacher for information about the spelling strategies your child.