

Dear Parents,

Spelling and literacy as a whole are a priority at KDPS. If a learner cannot successfully spell words then they are less likely to succeed at formal learning. Skills and strategies for learning 'how to spell' are a very important part of the spelling process. Even if a learner is able to 'spell a word', if they do not understand the process they cannot use this knowledge to spell unfamiliar words. As in maths, it is not just the correct answer that is important, the working memory and understanding of how to achieve the correct answer is vital to the cognitive process (deep understanding) for future learning.

Scientific research has shown phonics is a crucial strategy in the understanding of 'how to spell'. Knowing the 44 sounds of English and the various spelling choices that represent these sounds enables the learner to understand orthography (the spelling system of our language) and not be confused by restricted phonic patterns. For example, in English the letter 'c' does not just represent the sound (c) as heard at the beginning of words like cat. It can represent the sound (s) as in the words city, cent, Cindy etc. The sound (f) is not just represented by the letter 'f' but can be represented by the letters 'ph', as in photo, Sophie, Philip and Phoebe. The letter 'y' does not just represent the sound heard at the beginning of yawn, but more commonly represents the sound heard at the end of words like city, pony and Kelly, or the sound in the words my, tyre, fly and by.

Our school is committed to explicit, hands on phonics teaching. We look at phonics patterns within a whole word approach. That is, if we are teaching the word fish we focus on all the sounds not just one. Research has shown that students with a more comprehensive vocabulary and a greater understanding of the meanings of words will more successfully apply words to memory for spelling and are more competent in comprehension and writing. Spelling must be practised. Writing words in context to show meaning is a vital part of your child's spelling program. The spelling lists that your children will be working on at this school will be compiled by the classroom teacher and will contain words from all subjects focusing on relevant themes. The words will be relevant to their everyday learning, not just an abstract list of words from a commercially produced spelling book. The teacher will be focusing on word meaning, the phonetic structure of the word, links to other words with similar structure and the grammatical use of the word - plurals and tenses.

Your role as a parent is important in this process. Talking with your children about the meaning of words from the relevant classroom themes, using dictionaries and looking at the grammatical changes in words is far more important than 'rote' learning a word for testing at the end of the week. The more the learner can see the word in context, understand the meaning, make phonic links and practise writing words in a fun and meaningful way, the more competent and adventurous speller they will become. You will also be building vocabulary for future learning.

Koroit and District Primary School is using THRASS as the basis for phonics teaching and the MASUTA Spelling Sequence to develop your child's spelling skills and strategies.

It is important that your child learns the THRASS CHART, so that they are able to use the phonic information to decode (read) and encode (spell) words. Having this knowledge will allow your child to develop skills in reading, spelling, writing and reading comprehension enabling them to reach their full potential in literacy learning.

If you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact your classroom teacher or Marina Milich.