

Spelling Mastery Program

SPELLING MASTERY

Claremont College started a new spelling program in 2016, called Spelling Mastery. As part of this program there is an online component for use at home. To access this program you need your child's Username and Password which was provided to your child by the classroom teacher, and is inside the back cover of their diary.

The Spelling Mastery online activities are programmed to the level your child is working on in school. If your child makes an error with a particular word, that word will continue to appear in the following activities until success is achieved (100%) - i.e. Mastery of spelling. The same group of words and the associated rules, are learnt across 5 lessons, and then tested as ongoing monitoring.

To access the online activities go to: to <https://connected.mcgraw-hill.com/connected/login.do> and enter your child's user name and password.

SPELLING AT CLAREMONT COLLEGE in Newsletter dated 21 October 2016

As you will know, if you are a regular reader of our school newsletters, our school does exceptionally well in most things that NAPLAN assesses. The only exception to this is our spelling results that are still good, but in comparison to our other 'off the charts' results, our spelling appears to be weaker.

The actual results of our NAPLAN spelling results across the past eight years show that our students have achieved above the state averages 100% of the time, while they have achieved above the AIS (Association of Independent Schools) averages 73% of the time. As I said these are good results, but we all want them to be better, so I would like to outline the changes we are making to the school wide approach to the teaching of spelling.

We currently use a method introduced to us by David Hornsby in 2012. He believes, "phonics can be taught as children learn to read and write...children learn phonics through reading picture books, having fun with rhymes, playing with words and writing meaningful texts. (He) explains how within these contexts children learn the sounds of the English language, the letters of the alphabet, and the relationship between them."¹

We still agree with this approach where deep understanding comes from immersion in real contexts; however, the explicit teaching of spelling is lost in this approach alone. Therefore, we are adding a whole school approach to the explicit teaching of spelling skills using a program called 'Spelling Mastery'. This is not to say that we did not have an explicit approach to teaching spelling, but we believe, after a lot of research, that by utilising Spelling Mastery, we will have a better approach to the explicit teaching of spelling from Kindergarten to Year 6.

¹ Hornsby, D., <https://www.davidhornsby.com.au/>

This program uses an explicit, teacher-directed method called Direct Instruction. According to Dr John Hattie's review of over 800,000 research studies, Direct Instruction for explicit teaching achieves better results than alternative approaches.

Direct Instruction involves:

- A carefully sequenced curriculum of knowledge and skills;
- The explicit teaching of that curriculum;
- Flexible ability grouping, with children placed where they are at, within spelling; and
- Mastery learning, where children progress to the next level only when they have mastered the level they have been working on.

How Does Spelling Mastery Work?

The first step is to place each student in the level that they are currently performing. To do this, all students completed a series of short placement tests. Each student is then grouped within their stage and assisted to move forward by being taught following a scripted lesson for approximately 20 minutes, up to four days per week.

How you can help your child?

Your child will be explicitly taught spelling strategies during lessons at school. Spelling Mastery advocates that there is no necessity for them to learn spelling words as part of their homework. However, for us, in Years 1 to 6, spelling homework will continue. The spelling lists for each group will be sent home the week following each 'test lesson' so that consolidation can occur at home after the explicit teaching in class. The test lessons will not be on the same day of each week to reduce any anxiety around tests. We have purchased the online component of this program as well so that these can be included in your child's spelling homework, at your child's level. These online activities are intuitive and the children move forward according to their performance. In addition, spelling homework will include theme based words, when applicable, so that students can learn words that appear regularly within theme they are studying.

By utilising this whole school approach to explicit teaching combined with David Hornsby's approach to learning spelling through immersion in language, we are expecting to improve our students' spelling across all year groups.



If you have any questions about Spelling Mastery or your child's spelling, please do not hesitate to contact either Mrs Dalheim (Head of Learning Support) or myself.

Janelle Ford
Deputy Principal

TROUBLE SHOOTING SPELLING MASTERY – in Newsletter dated 3 March 2017.

Firstly, please accept our apology for any inconvenience that may have been caused by the Spelling Mastery online activities. We appreciate your candid feedback, and have acted swiftly to solve any problems under our control. Be assured that we have also contacted McGraw-Hill and asked for solutions to each of your issues raised. Please keep the feedback coming, good and bad, as it is important for us to know how the program is working, so we can make decisions about the school's future use of the online component of the program.

Some of the feedback received so far relating to the online component of the Spelling Mastery program includes:

- the program freezes when used in some browsers, and on some iPads
- the program does not store the place of where each child is up to
- the American accent and occasional confusion with a spelling pattern
- the clunkiness of the program in general, i.e. locating activities, navigating the activities
- feedback and monitoring progress
- the App doesn't have activities allocated to my child



IDEAS and INTERIM MEASURES

1. Choice of browser: Google Chrome and Mozilla have been identified by McGraw-Hill to prevent or at least reduce the likelihood of the program freezing.

2. Keeping track of which lesson your child is up to: Parent (or older students) to write down which lesson has been completed, so you know where to start for the next session.

3. American accent and spelling patterns: Be available to re-pronounce a word, if needed. Explain to your child/ren that Spelling Mastery is a US based program so US spelling alternatives are prioritised.
Eg. color instead of colour, jell instead of gel.

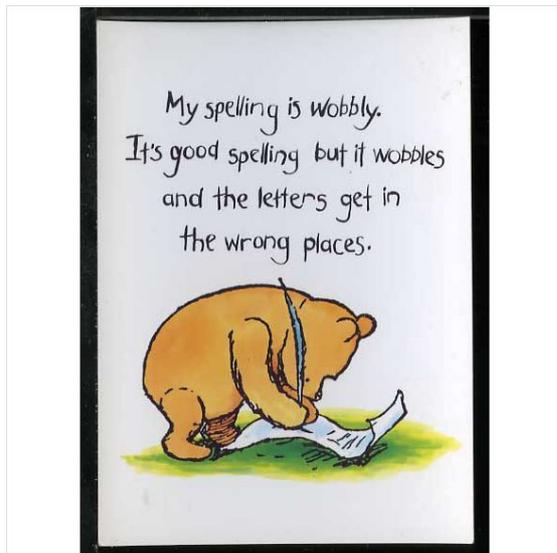
* We understand that some children have found the US spelling patterns a little confusing, however we believe it is useful for students to be exposed to both English and American spelling patterns, in a supervised environment (through the lessons) as both are now prominent in the websites they visit, the media, and books they read. However, you may

need to be nearby if further explanation is needed. Eg. when a child can't find the correctly spelt word in his/her set of four words: jell, geel, jel, gell.

4. Clunkiness: we have no immediate solutions to the 'clunkiness', but we hope that with time you will learn it's idiosyncrasies. Please be assured all feedback is forwarded to McGraw-Hill.

5. Lack of feedback for students: we ask that you assist by providing feedback at home. Please know that the program is intuitive, so if your child spelling a word correctly through a number of activities then that word disappears. On the flip side if your child does not spell a word correctly, then it keeps appearing, until they get it right, on a number of occasions. So the program, in time, adapts to the needs of your child. As for understanding if your child is progressing, this is monitored at school, with a spelling test, every 5 lessons.

6. The Spelling Mastery App: Please do not use the Spelling Mastery App freely available through the App Store as this is NOT an official Spelling Mastery website associated with the program we are teaching at school. It is an independent product that is piggy-backing off the name, and does not follow the structure we are teaching at school and cannot be monitored by your child's teacher. Please go through the website address provided: <https://connected.mcgraw-hill.com/connected/login.do> .



In conclusion, we have responded to all queries from parents relating to the level their child is on. Each child has been assessed using the Spelling Mastery placement test. If the program has been identified as too easy for your child, we have re-tested, to check placement.

The online activities that your child has access to are aligned with the level identified by the placement test. Words may appear easy, but students are learning the associated morphographics for each word group (root words, prefixes, and suffixes, combined with **spelling** rules), so that students not only spell the words, but know why in the word, sounds may vary from their commonly used pronunciations. For example, in chemist ch makes the k sound and not the ch sound.

So please bear with us, as the Spelling Mastery program is NOT a memorisation spelling program, and many of our students who appear to be good spellers, will now develop a deeper understanding of spelling instead of having to hear us say “it’s just an exception to the rule”, if a word does not fit a spelling pattern.

Ms Brenda Dalheim
Head of Learning Support