★Are there students with a below average reading age? The Learning Support Team screens cohorts of students using standardised reading and spelling tests – a test measured against established norms / averages for that age group.

A standardised test will provide an age equivalent score which gives an indicator of ability / skill – as a rule of thumb, the following is accepted: [2]

10:06+ *'functional readers'*	Students working at 10:06+ in their reading are generally viewed as 'functional readers'. • They will typically be able to read fluently, decoding new words with ease and quickly understanding their meaning with teaching. • They will be able to access most secondary school text books • However, they will continue to require practise and enrichment in the classroom – with a focus on inference, deduction and other more analytical skills.
9:06 → 10:06 *'slightly below average'* *'moving towards functionality'*	Students are 'moving towards functionality' and should do so without specialist intervention. • With concentration, they will able to decode and understand high-frequency / common words in a sustained way, with relative ease. • They may require occasional support in the classroom with reading subject-specific texts in the form of adapted texts, active teaching of new / unfamiliar vocabulary, encouragement etc. • However, they will require continued practise of reading on a daily basis in the classroom, at home or during other social times.
8:00 → 9:06 *'slightly below average'* *'breakthrough stage'*	Students are 'moving towards functionality' but require further teaching of reading. • With concentration, they will able to decode and understand high-frequency / common words. They may tire easily and be unable to sustain performance. • They will often 'surface level read' – decoding but not comprehending. • They will require continuous support in the classroom with reading subject-specific texts in the form of adapted texts, active teaching of new / unfamiliar vocabulary, encouragement etc. • However, they will require continued practise of reading on a daily basis delivered through a 'catch up' scheme of work / intervention.
7:00 → 8:00 *'well below average'* *'limited functionality'*	Students have foundational gaps in their reading skills that will require intervention in the form of reading programmes. • Reading of typical secondary texts will be laboured, hesitant and tiring. Reading will be stressful. • With encouragement and non-critical / supportive prompting, they will be able to decode most monosyllabic and some polysyllabic high-frequency / common words. • They will often be reliant on 'sight vocabulary' – by this we mean familiarity with how a word looks (shape, starting sound) rather than familiarity with patterns / decoding skills. • They will sometimes miscue words – seeing the starting sound and shape then jumping for a best guess. i.e. "shrimp" may be read as "ship". • They will struggle to read and retain subject-specific vocabulary even with active teaching.
6:11 and below *'building blocks stage'* *'no functionality in reading'*	Students will have large foundational gaps, generally at this age (11+) due to a specific learning difficulty – usually identified but sometimes not. They will require intervention from specialist programmes that 're-teach' skills through a different approach to those tried previously. • Reading of standard secondary texts will be almost impossible. • Reading skills are often limited to CVCs. • Some vowel and consonant blends will be known – often through a reliance on 'sight vocabulary' rather than transferable understanding of how letters can blend to make new sounds. • Other underlying issues may be present such as inconsistent knowledge of the alphabet, limited rhyming skills, limited sequencing skills, poor working memory, speech and language needs etc.

It is worth noting that reading ages are generally higher than spelling ages. An increase in reading age is typically followed by an increase in spelling age.

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[2] Acknowledgment – Trish Austin, Ladywood Outreach

★Are there students with a below average spelling age? The Learning Support Team screens cohorts of students using standardised reading and spelling tests – a test measured against established norms / averages for that age group.

A standardised test will provide an age equivalent score which gives an indicator of ability / skill – as a rule of thumb, the following is accepted: [3]

10:06+ *'functional spellers'*	Students working at 10:06+ in their spelling are generally viewed as 'functional spellers'. - They will be able to consistently spell high-frequency / common words with automaticity. - They will be able to spell unfamiliar polysyllabic words with regular patterns. - With encouragement, they will attempt to use more adventurous choices of words that they don't necessarily know the spelling of. - However, they will continue to require some input – especially on subject-specific words with irregular spelling patterns. - They will also continue to require input on constructing sentences / writing organisation.
9:00 →10:06 *'slightly below average'* *'moving towards functionality'*	Students are 'moving towards functionality' and should do so without specialist intervention. - They will be able to spell common words with occasional reminders on 'peculiarities' such as homophones, silent letters etc. - They will be able to spell familiar polysyllabic words with regular patterns. - They will require support in the classroom with spelling subject-specific words in the form of key word lists. - They will continue to require periodic input / consolidation on spelling patterns and strategies – possibly through starter activities.
8:00 → 9:00 *'slightly below average'* *'breakthrough stage'*	Students are at a 'breakthrough stage', competent in sounding out words and familiar with some frequently-used patterns, but ultimately limited in their range of skills. - They will be able to spell many simple, monosyllabic words and some high-frequency / common polysyllabic words. - They will be able to make phonetically-plausible attempts at unfamiliar polysyllabic words spelt incorrectly. Their weakness will emerge with 'peculiarities', exceptions, prefixes, suffixes etc. - They will require support in the classroom with word lists covering more complex high-frequency / common words and subject-specific words. - They will continue to require weekly input on spelling patterns and strategies – through whole-group spelling sessions and intervention programmes.
7:00 → 8:00 *'well below average'* *'limited functionality'*	Students have foundational gaps in their spelling skills that will require sustained teaching in the form of phonetics / spelling programmes. - They will be able to spell some simple, monosyllabic words with phonetically plausible attempts at those spelt incorrectly. - A small proportion of high-frequency polysyllabic words will be spelt correctly with reminders from the teacher. - They may sometimes attempt to spell unfamiliar words but will typically be dependent on the teacher for spellings. - They will require support in the classroom with word lists covering more complex high-frequency / common words and subject-specific words. - They will continue to require weekly input on spelling patterns and strategies – through whole-group spelling sessions and intervention programmes.
6:11 and below *'building blocks stage'* *'no functionality in spelling'*	Students will have large foundational gaps, generally at this age (11+) due to a specific learning difficulty – usually identified but sometimes not. They will require intervention from specialist programmes that 're-teach' skills through a different approach to those tried previously. - They will have basic awareness of phonic strategies for spelling. They will rely on a mix of phonic strategies and sight vocabulary to spell some high-frequency / common monosyllabic words. - Their written vocabulary will be limited. They often have a higher spoken vocabulary. - They may scribe / copy written work well which in turn disguises their difficulties. - Other underlying issues may be present such as inconsistent knowledge of the alphabet, limited rhyming skills, limited sequencing skills, poor working memory, speech and language needs etc.

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[3] Acknowledgment – PIVATS, Lancashire County Council

Supporting Written Tasks

There are students within school who cannot demonstrate their full ability because they are too often confined to written responses – particularly 'free writing' activities where students are greeted with a blank page and asked to fill it.

In the supportive classroom, there should be readily available alternatives to these kinds of written responses – planned as an integral part of a scheme of work.

These include:

- Spider diagrams
- Mind-maps
- Flow diagrams
- Bullet pointed lists
- Writing frames / cloze procedure
- Ticking or circling the correct response
- Ordering or prioritising events with letters or numbers
- Recording information on a pre-prepared grid, chart, graph, diagram, timeline etc.
- Crosswords, crack the code, anagrams, wordsearches, hangman etc. to demonstrate understanding of new vocabulary
- Correct the errors
- Spot the odd one out
- Voice recording
- Photos
- Video footage
- PowerPoint presentations
- Prepare quiz questions for the class
- Peer interviews
- Hot-seating
- Create a computer game
- Create a cartoon / picture-board
- Drama or role-play
- Look at the answer, guess the question
- Colour-coding key facts, events etc.
- Create a class poster
- Create a pod-cast
- Create a webpage
- Twitter Q&A

Students will need pro-actively coaching in these skills and therefore it is often more effective to pick 2 – 3 and work on them repeatedly through a scheme of work rather than 'toe dipping' into as many as possible.

VCOP – A Tool for Free Writing

When a less structured written response is required, a strategy proven at primary level and easily transferable to secondary is the VCOP grid.[4]

Here is an example using World War 1 as the topic.

Vocab.	**C**onnectives
What subject-specific words do we need to know?	*What words will help us construct longer sentences?*
trench strategy attrition artillery casualties	and so because as well as but
Openers	**P**unctuation
What phrases can help us start our sentences and paragraphs?	*What punctuation should we be using?*
1. Point: From the source, we can see that… 2. Evidence: This is seen in (image, text) 3. Explain: This highlights…	**CAP** Capital letter – used at the beginning of a sentence and names • Full stop – used at the end of a sentence **" "** Speech marks – put around quotations

For the more creative teacher, VCOP grids can be turned into placemats or cardboard pyramids that can sit on each desk.
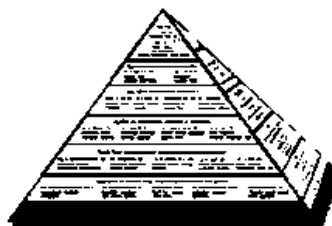
Supporting Spelling

With the onset of computer-based spell-checkers, spelling has perhaps become less of an obstacle to writing. However, a poor speller will tend to demonstrate less fluency, confidence and independence in their writing – particularly handwritten work. They may also avoid applying new vocabulary simply because they cannot spell a word and don't have the self-belief or strategies to make a reasonable attempt.

There are two key strategies (or 'tricks' as students may prefer to call them) for spelling – one primarily auditory and kinaesthetic, the other visual.

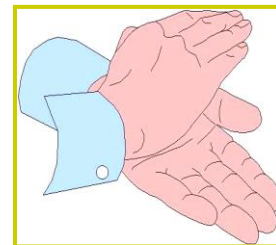Spelling Trick 1

Break it down!

Step 1:
Say the word to yourself.

Step 2:
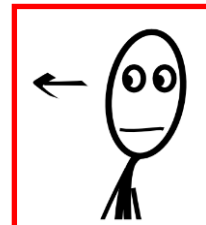**Count** the syllables.

Step 3:
Try to spell out each syllable.

Look and cover...
...Write and check

Step 1:
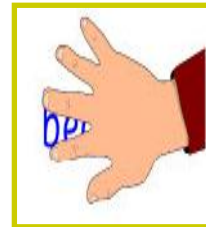**Look** at the word and say it to yourself. Try to spot patterns you know.

Step 2:
Cover the word. Try to picture it in your head.

Step 3:
Write the word.

Step 4:
Check the spelling by asking a teacher or by using a dictionary.

For students who frequently struggle to spell, these can be printed, cut out and stuck in the back or front of their exercise books.

Common Words

For those students with significant difficulties in their spelling, it may also be useful to place a bank of common / high-frequency words used frequently in your subject area. This will help increase independence and boost confidence amongst the most vulnerable learners.

Common Words A - M

A a	after again always another any away about afternoon anything
B b	back been before because boy bye buy by
C c	can come could can't came compare
D d	down don't didn't design different difference diagram discuss decide
E e	enough excited explain example experiment
F f	for fast father first from find four found forward fruit
G g	go gone get gave girl give going got green good
H h	here hand have head help home house how
I i	into instead I'm it's investigate
J j	just jump
K k	know knew keep
L l	last left live look little
M m	more make made much must mother many morning

Common Words N - Z

N n	new now next name night nothing
O o	off old only our other out over once open own one
P p	perhaps probably people
Q q	quite quiet quickly
R r	right read round research
S s	some school should soon stop sorry sometimes something somewhere
T t	their there these too to two table turn think
U u	under underneath understand
V v	very vegetable
W w	would where which when were who whether wrong write written
X x Y y Z z	year your yesterday

For more information on common words / high frequency words, visit:

www.duboislc.org/EducationWatch/First100Words.html

Textbooks, Worksheets, Websites and PowerPoint Slides

Textbooks, worksheets, websites and PowerPoint slides tend to be used as the primary sources of information-input required for learning. Therefore it is important before presenting them to students – particularly those with below average reading skills – that the following is considered:

1. Check the readability and the reading level of the material.

2. Aim for a minimum size of 12 - 14 and 1.5 line spacing.

3. Pick a font with an alphabet that mirrors a handwritten alphabet – **Comic Sans** is recommended for younger students, **Century Gothic** is recommended for older students.

4. Highlight (**bold**, colour) or underline key words or instructions.

5. Remove instructions that can be given orally.

6. Divide the resource into sections using headers, boxes, divider lines, different coloured fonts / backgrounds.

7. Avoid poor quality photocopies, enlarging etc.

8. Use icons / symbols / pictures to aid the student's understanding of the task required.

Think carefully about your answer.
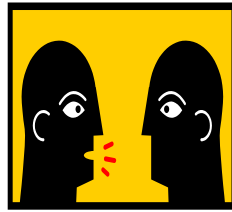
Talk about it with a partner.

This is a listening task.

9. Use cartoons, diagrams, pictures to illustrate key points and aid comprehension.

10. Give lists of useful / key words in a box at the foot of the page.

11. Provide a numbering / lettering system or coloured bullet points / arrows so students can find their way around the page.

12. Avoid using too many styles including italics, outline, shadow, bold etc. in any one document.

13. Repeat key concepts to provide opportunity for over-learning.

14. Where possible, avoid using black / white text combinations - use a pastel blue or green coloured background.

15. Where answers are to be recorded on the worksheet, provide sufficient space and guidelines. Make use of both open-ended and close questions.

Resources for visually-impaired students should be adapted with advice / support from the Learning Support Team. Simply enlarging these resources on a photocopier will not be enough.