

Transforming Primary QTS

Teaching Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling in Primary Schools

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1. Be clear about what the children already know, understand and are able to do, so that you are clear about their misconceptions. Remember that it is not just about plugging gaps in knowledge – all grammar is interrelated, so it is important to make sure that understanding is based on a firm foundation. In addition to whole-class teaching, use guided sessions to work with groups of children who share the same misconceptions
2. Do use the correct terminology throughout the school. Some of the terms we have become used to have changed: for example, make sure you talk about adverbs, adverbials, progressive verbs, prepositions and conjunctions rather than the generic term *connectives*. Be careful to be precise. Verbs are commonly talked about as *doing words* – but they also include *to be* and *to have*. Some schools have chosen colours for different word classes (for example, green for adjectives, blue for nouns) and used these consistently across the school. This approach can be helpful, but remember that words can belong to different word classes according to how they are used (see Chapter 2 and below).
3. Use language which avoids suggesting that words have a fixed ‘class’, and show that it depends on the job they do in the sentence. The word *green*, for example, can be an adjective, noun or verb. Encourage a problem-solving approach. If children are unsure about the job the word is doing, suggest that they swap in other words to help them to work out what it might be.

Make sure children know why as well as what, so that they can answer questions such as *Why do the underlined words start with a capital letter?* (DfE, Key Stage 1 sample test).

4. Try to have a short grammar/punctuation/vocabulary/spelling warm-up session every day where children can play with language in creative and imaginative ways. Use drama to help children take on more formal ‘voices’ – at Key Stage 1 this will really help with Standard English. Integrate these sessions with your units of work so that there are opportunities to practise and apply new learning in English and across the curriculum.
5. Use precise meta-language when modelling writing yourself and when modelling the redrafting process, focusing on the impact that you want to have on your reader. Use it selectively and appropriately in your marking, always taking care to respond to the text as a whole first and not just to words and sentences.
6. Encourage children to use language precisely when peer- and self-assessing. Make sure you have modelled how to do this. If you have a visualiser, use it to discuss the writing of one of the children or to point out how authors have used the particular aspect of grammar or punctuation that the children have been learning during shared reading.
7. Make sure you don’t just test spelling and punctuation, but teach it too. Challenge children to come up with ‘rules’ themselves rather than simply telling them – this approach can be used for punctuation and spelling. There are suggestions for ways of doing this in the earlier chapters.