

# Choosing a School Dictionary

It's important to get it right!  
Here are some test-points to help you decide:

## Easy to use

Is it easy to use? Can you find the words you want, fast? Does it have the alphabet down the side for easy navigation? Do the headwords stand out? Is the use of colour effective? Is it clear, accessible, with no confusing abbreviations?

## Coverage

Does it include all the words you need when you are 11 years old and also when you are 14 years old? Is it up to date? Does it include ICT words like *applet, bandwidth, router, runtime*? Does it give words children come across in the literature they read, like *banshee, sleepover, bas-relief, jejune, obdurate*? Does it give terms that are multi-cultural, like *tamarind, feng shui, sadhu, Succoth, feta*? Does it include words from world English, Australia and New Zealand (*bandicoot, haka, swagman*) and South Africa (*backveld, donga, mealie*)?

## National Curriculum

Does it include all the words you need to look up in school and when doing your homework? Does it include all the vocabulary given in the KS3 NLS documents? Does it include words like *grapheme, morpheme, calligram, cinquain, digraph*? Does it fulfil all the NLS objectives at word/sentence/text level for Yr7, 8, and 9? Can it be used across the curriculum? Does it give subject vocabulary from biology like *cortex, lesion*, politics like *globalization, lobbying*, religion like *sharia*?

## Definitions

Some words are difficult to explain. Does it have a good definition for words like *irony* and *hindsight*? Does it show that the opposite of *concave* is *convex*, or compare pairs of words such as *carnivorous* and *herbivorous*, *libel* and *slander*?

### **Notes on correct spelling, grammar, usage**

Does it explain when to write *accept* and *except*, *cereal* and *serial*, *continual* and *continuous*, *further* and *farther*? Does it help you with confusable words like *their*, *there*, and *they're*, or *palate*, *palette*, *pallet*? Does it give advice on whether *media* is used as a singular or plural? Does it cover key language topics like *word classes*, *clauses*, *tenses*, *punctuation*?

### **Context and example sentences**

Does it support writing? Does it provide good example sentences to give guidance on how words like *abreast*, *comprise*, *myriad* are used? Does it show you how to use 'powerful' words like *canter*, *clamber*, *huddle*, *torrent*?

Does it support reading? Does it help with the study of literary texts? Does it include words used by authors like Geraldine McCaughrean (*intone*, *lurch*), Philip Pullman (*lunge*, *plague*, *taboo*), Tolkien (*baleful*, *beset*, *elf*, *tidings*), J K Rowling (*centaur*, *elixir*, *poltergeist*, *foreboding*), Eoin Colfer (*decoy*, *paranoid*)?

### **Overused words**

Does it support language development and give guidance on how to avoid overused words, like *all right*, *get*, *nice*? Does it give alternatives?

### **Vocabulary extension**

Does it give synonyms to extend and enrich your vocabulary?

### **Word Histories**

Does it give interesting origins of words such as *handicap*, *deadline*, *pylon*?

### **Word families**

Does it show relationships between words across the alphabet, like *moon/lunar*, *sun/solar*, *dog/canine*, *east/oriental*, *queen/regal*?

### **Appendices**

Some information is more usefully presented in lists. What does the dictionary offer?

