



Handwriting Policy

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Handwriting – a useful, elegant and essential branch of education

Teaching handwriting is a priority. Children need to be able to:

- write without thinking about **how** to write
- This enables them to concentrate on **what** to write.

Essential points

By the age of 8, most children have adopted a pencil grip, formed a style and developed habits which are hard to change. It is essential that they have been taught the correct habits by this stage. It is in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 that these should be taught: teachers in this part of the school should regularly check that children are holding a pencil correctly, for example.

Joined handwriting should be taught as soon as they have learnt to form their letters correctly, for us this is in Year 1. Nursery and Reception are taught a printed script. Isolated letters should only be taught when problems arise.

The discrimination between **printed script** (a conventional script used by publishers for books and also for computer generated word-processed documents) and **cursive script** (a conventional written script) should continually be pointed out to children. Children should understand that books and newspapers and many other printed materials can be written in printed script.

When writing comments in a children's book, always write in a cursive hand that the children can read. It is crucially important that they can read your handwriting.

The teaching of handwriting is essentially a non-creative activity which involves training, tracing, copying and practising (remind the children: *practise makes perfect!*). It is essential that they watch the teacher demonstrating how to write and subsequently try it for themselves. As handwriting is a movement skill, demonstration by a competent teacher is essential.

Fundamental issues which must be taught to children

- An orthodox pencil grip.
- The fact that a pencil must always be sharp before you use it.
- Tiny pencils, less than 8 cm. long should be discarded.
- How to sit on a chair properly (not slouch), sitting up, with a straight back, the chair pushed in a comfortable amount and both legs under the table. The children's thighs should be parallel and their feet flat on the floor.
- All four chair legs must be on the ground – children should not be rocking.

- The fact that the non-writing hand (left for right handers; right for left handers) should be on the table in front of the child in a supportive position.
- When writing, books should be fully open, not folded over. Children should be sitting in such a way that their books are not overlapping when they are writing.
- Right handers can tilt their book to the left. Left handers can tilt their book to the right. In each case the amount of tilt should be no more than 45 degrees. Quite simply, children should not be allowed to write at a 90-degree angle.
- A clutter free table is required with adequate space for a number of children to write.

Above all, avoid the creation of the following four ingrained habits

- ❖ Faulty pencil grip
- ❖ Poor posture
- ❖ Poor book/paper positioning
- ❖ Incorrect letter formation

Left handers

- There is no doubt that it is harder to learn to write left handed, as during the act of writing you are covering what you are writing. Our writing system favours the right-handed child.
- Left-handed children should always sit on the left-hand side of the desk. This makes writing infinitely easier for them. Children must be taught this and continually reminded of it.
- Left handers tend to write lower down, so they should tilt their page to the right. To stop them tilting too far, masking tape can be used to provide an outline for their book position. Left handers will often kneel at the desk: this is because they need to write lower down. Often a left hander may be too low down. To correct this either a cushion, a lower table or a higher chair can be used.
- Left handers tend to need a slightly longer stem to write with.

A few technical terms to teach children

- ❖ The word **cursive** means joined.
- ❖ The correct name for the joining bits between letters is **ligatures**.
- ❖ The technical name for a tail is a **flourish**.
- ❖ The technical word for handwriting is **calligraphy**.
- ❖ The letters b, d, h, k, and l are called **ascenders**. The top of the letter should reach very close to the top of the line (it shouldn't touch!). The letter **t is not an ascender**.
- ❖ The letters g, j, p, q and y are called **descenders**. The flourish these letters have goes below the line.
- ❖ **t** is an unusual letter – a three quarters letter, rather than an ascender

Other vocabulary children should be taught:

- ❖ clockwise
- ❖ anticlockwise

- ❖ vertical
- ❖ horizontal
- ❖ diagonal
- ❖ parallel
- ❖ consonant
- ❖ vowel
- ❖ joined
- ❖ sloped
- ❖ loop

Key points about joining letters ('Join it' scheme)

- Letters that end at the top join horizontally: o r t v w x
- Letters that end at the bottom join diagonally: f a c d e h i k l m n u g y b j p q s z
- Capital letters should not be huge. They should be no higher than ascenders.

Teaching methodology & time each week

Research shows that children make most progress when they have short, focused writing sessions.

In the Foundation Stage, staff should focus closely upon the formation of correct habits. They should closely observe what children do with a writing implement and teach children the correct conventions to follow.

- In reception short writing sessions are needed every day.
- In Year 1 to Year 4, handwriting should be taught through modelling and shared writing every day.

Children have to understand that they must '*do their best writing*' in all their writing not just when practicing. Children in Class 2 and 3 will be marked against our presentation system.

Children can be assisted to improve by developing their ability to discriminate between handwriting that is of a high quality and that which is of an inferior quality. One way to assist them to do this is to get them to look at a sentence written in two different ways and appraise the sentences critically. Teachers should help children to see common errors. They should also exaggerate the errors children produce to make these clear to the children. Allowing children to see errors beside a correct version helps develop the skill of discrimination.

Some strongly held convictions

In general, children who feel good about their handwriting are far more motivated to write. Those who have a negative self-image of themselves as a writer and are resistant to writing usually have poor handwriting that they are unhappy with.

As a general rule, children who have attractive cursive handwriting are better at spelling than children who have untidy handwriting, or those that print.

Underachievement in writing and all other curriculum areas which involve some form of writing is often the result of poor ability in handwriting often combined with poor layout and organisational skills (there appears to be a far higher prevalence of this amongst boys than girls).

The essential qualities of good handwriting are fluency, neatness and speed.

