

# SAINT MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY ACADEMY

*Mr J O'Connor – Head Teacher*



## CURRICULUM POLICY FOR HANDWRITING

Approved by: J. O'Connor

Date: May 2023

Last reviewed on: May 2023

Next review due by: To be monitored and updated as required

## CURRICULUM POLICY FOR HANDWRITING

### *Mission Statement*

*"We Value All in the Name of Jesus the Christ"*

### Introduction

"Handwriting is a tool that has to work. It must be comfortable, fast and legible." (Angela Webb, Chair, National Handwriting Association)

Children must be able to write with ease, speed and legibility. If they have difficulty, this will limit fluency and inhibit the quality and quantity of their work. It is important that the child's handwriting becomes a skill that requires little effort and thought, so that creative and physical energy can be focused on the content of writing, rather than upon the act. We help children to achieve the steps towards independently using a continuous cursive style.

We aim for children to:

- Achieve a neat, legible style with correctly formed letters in a continuous cursive handwriting
- Develop flow and speed to aid expressing themselves creatively and imaginatively across the curriculum and for a range of purposes
- To automatically use clearly formed and joined handwriting in all of their writing
- Use their skills with confidence, in real life situations

### Teaching Handwriting – it's complicated!

Handwriting is a very **complex task**. Moving a pencil to make letters is primarily a motor skill. However, recognising letters is a visual and memory skill. Knowing letter names and sounds relies on hearing, memory and language. Writing words and sentences requires the ability to combine all of these skills.

At its core, writing letters correctly on the page is a **motor skill**. It requires pencil control, knowledge of the formation pattern and the ability to perceive visually distances. Motor skills require practise to become proficient.

### Handwriting is learnt

Handwriting is not a skill that humans are innately born to do. Walking, we naturally learn. General fine motor skills are learnt through play. Anyone who has watched two and three years olds play know that they are forever repeating skills. They open, close, fill, dump and constantly explore with their hands. This **repetition improves their skills**.

When toddlers pick up a crayon they explore. This exploration might include drawing on the walls and sofa! It then becomes more refined. They draw shapes, they draw people and they draw things. Then, they are taught to write their name.

### Handwriting should be taught

The new [policy guidance](#) from the National Handwriting Association [NHA] (2019 p. 31) recommends that 'handwriting skills need to be taught both as a timetabled discrete subject and through ongoing reinforcement of skills in everyday written language activities.' They suggest that **lessons should be focused, short and at regular intervals**,

but will be influenced by the age of the children and the class profile.

A daily session of ten minutes is recommended for young children learning letter formations. For older children, three sessions of 15 – 20 minutes per week may work better.

At our school, KS1 & KS2 are explicitly taught handwriting 2-3 times a week for 15–20-minutes a time. This then can form part of the homework sent home to complete.

Early on, there should be a strong focus on letter formations. Sassoon (1995) highlighted that *'unless the correct point of entry and direction of stroke for each letter is taught, understood and used from the start, it is progressively difficult to alter the wrong movement pattern that is practised and becomes habitual.'*

Incorrect formation patterns can make handwriting illegible. They can slow a child down as they won't automatically finish a letter on the right side to start the next. It also makes progressing to joined-up writing more difficult. Therefore, it makes sense to teach correct formations right from the start.

## [Intent](#)

At St Mary's Catholic Primary Academy, we are committed to providing a safe and secure learning environment that is friendly, nurturing, inspiring and supportive for all learners.

## [Implementation and Impact](#)

### Handwriting in the Early Years:

At St Mary's, we assess pupil's readiness to write in Foundation Stage 1 and on entry for any new pupils in FS2. This forms the next steps in planning for pupils and areas of provision

### Teaching handwriting – steps that we consider

- Can the child sit up in their chair?
- Do they have sufficient shoulder stability?
- Can they hold a pencil? Have they had experiences with colouring and drawing?
- Can they recognise their letters? We explore these questions further in :- [Five essential motor skills for handwriting success.](#)

The provision in the EYFS supports the foundations for the skills required to read and write. In our areas of provision, wide ranging resources develop fine and gross motor skills for marking making to writing, developing the skills required to become good writers.

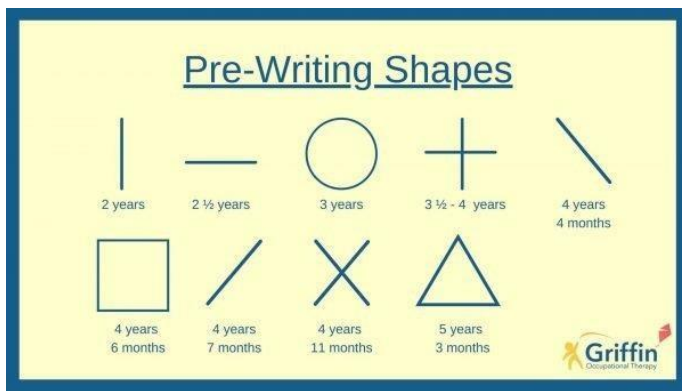
### Teaching handwriting – pencil control

Pencil control is an essential part of writing letters and so therefore, this skill is taught in the EYFS. More information on pencil grasp development you can be found here – [What does a good pencil grasp look like?](#)

### Pre-writing skills

Prior to writing, children need to be able to make their pre-writing shapes. **Pre-writing shapes are all of the shapes that form letters.** They include the directional movements a child needs to make, like diagonal lines and curves. There are many worksheets that practice these. It is also important to focus on squares and triangles as the ability to create corners is an important developmental step.

These are the pre-writing shapes in order of difficulty: | – o + / square \ x triangle.



Letters are made up of combinations of vertical, horizontal, oblique and curved shapes. Oblique lines (\ /) are much harder to write than straight lines. The age at which half of children can draw an oblique line is four years and six months (Beery, 2010).

The age where half of children can intersect both oblique lines to form an 'x' it is four years and 11 months. This means that several capital letters and lower case letters 'k, v, w, x' are actually outside of the expected age norms for many reception children. These norms should be considered, especially for children who have names including letters containing oblique lines.

- In the Early Years, we provide many opportunities indoors and out to develop fine and gross motor skills for children to practise these combinations of shapes according to their age and stage.
- Provision for scissor skills at Stage 1 and 2 to be mastered is an expectation in FS1.

## Letter Formation in Foundation Stage 2

### Letter formation groups

Teaching handwriting in letter formation groups is key to progress from these early shapes. As said above, writing is a motor skill, which needs to be practised. When coaches teach motor skills, for example tennis or swimming, similar movements are practised together. The easier movements are taught first and then they are built on.

At our school, we teach letters in formation groups, NOT in phonics groups. When teaching handwriting, we teach the same movements together.

These are the groups in order that we teach, practise, rehearse, apply:

1. l t i j u y
2. r n m h b
3. c o a d g q s f e
4. v w z x k



We teach handwriting as families of letter: These videos show the movement and can be used in class, or at home: [BBC Bitesize](#)

**long ladder letters** l, i, t, u, y, j

**one-armed robot letters** b, h, k, m, n, p,

**r curly caterpillar letters** c, a, d, g, q, o,

**e, s, zigzag letters** z, v, w, x, k

- In order to ensure children 'master' the formation of letters, handwriting is not taught as a one-off activity. For example, one line of each letter is not committed to memory. Children are observed in forming their letters and not left alone.
- Children should not be writing in the air, they should be seated at a table. At our school, we know the importance of correctly formed letters and the transition to paper and pencil as quickly as possible.
- We send letter formation home in FS2. Parents have been shown how to form letters correctly through workshops in order to support their children.
- Exercise books for handwriting are lined
- Scissor skills at Stage 3 and 4 have been mastered

### **Handwriting in Year One**

- **All of the above (FS2) plus:**
- Children by this point should all be forming letters accurately. Any pupil who is not will be supported through early interventions on entry into Year 1.
- In Year 1, the pencil grasp is correct and children are confident in using scissors at Stage 2 and Stage 3 level.
- By the end of Year One, children are using pre-cursive letters in readiness for joining.

### **Handwriting in Year Two**

- During the Autumn Term, children have mastered pre cursive writing.
- Exercise books are lined and sent home for additional practice.
- Letters are committed to memory through constant practice- not just a few lines.
- All letters are formed accurately and timely interventions support pupils new into Year 2 or those who need additional support.
- Cursive writing is taught in the spring term.
- By the end of Year 2, pupils are using cursive confidently and Stage 3 and 4 scissor skills.

### **Handwriting in Year 3 and Year 4**

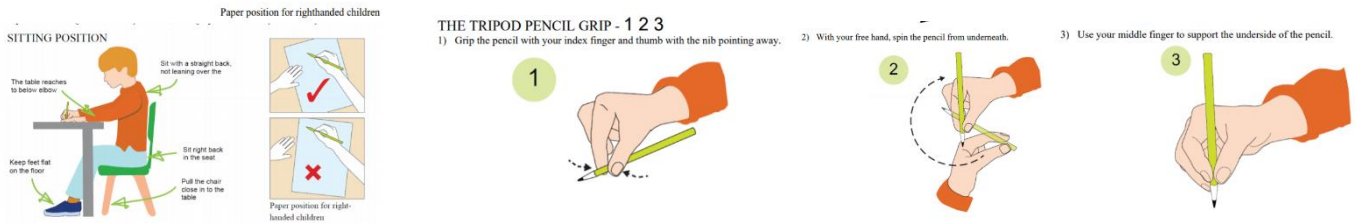
- From the very beginning of Autumn term, children increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting e.g. ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant and that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch.
- When the children are producing consistently formed, sized and joined handwriting, they will be granted a 'pen license' and encouraged to write in pen where appropriate.

### **Handwriting in Year 5 and Year 6**

Children should be taught to write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by:

- choosing which shape of a letter to use when given choices and deciding whether or not to join specific letters
  - choosing the right implement that is best suited for a task

## **Pencil Grasp**



### **What can I do to help a child who has an immature pencil grasp?**

Firstly, you need to consider if a child has adequate fine motor skills. For younger children or children with developmental delays it is important to consider if they are ready to hold a pencil. The child also needs to be demonstrating an interest in mark making. They do not need to be Picasso, but they do need to be interested in holding a marker and watching the marks it makes. If the child is not at this stage, then you may want to start with:

- Mark making with finger paints (use edible paint if the child is mouthing paint)
- Mark making with fingers in sand
- Using a paint brush to paint water onto windows and fences outside
- Level one or two of our fine motor skill development programme could be a better starting point for these children.

For children under five years of age, we strongly recommend using finger crayons and small pencils to help them develop the hand control and strength required to develop a tripod grasp. We would highly recommend these if the child is still using a gross grasp, digital pronate grasp, or they are spreading all of their fingers along the pencil. You can make small pencils by sawing regular thick pencils into 3-4cm lengths or you can use small pieces of crayon. The video below discusses why you might consider these alternatives. We discuss other pencil grips in our article [To pencil grip, or not to pencil grip?](#)

## **Essentials 1 – Gross motor skills**

### **Motor skills for handwriting – Postural control and shoulder stability**

Before a child can hold their pencil effectively, they need to be able to sit up. Sitting requires adequate postural control. Postural control is our ability to keep our bodies stable when we are stationary and when we move. It is essential for us to be able to use our arms, hands and fingers with good control.



Imagine a building. In order for it to stand up, there needs to be strong foundations underneath. Without strong foundations a building would fall over. Our foundation is postural control. Postural control starts developing from the moment a child is born. Initially, babies have no postural control. Their heads even need support. Over time a baby can hold their head up and then push up on their arms and roll over. Tummy time helps to develop these skills and helps with shoulder stability.

Our shoulders are the next layer of the foundation. They are like the concrete floor on a building. Our shoulders support our arms and hands, in the same way the floor supports the walls. When there is reduced shoulder stability, a child will have less control over their arms and hand.

### **Help a child to develop their postural control and shoulder stability**

1. Get off the devices and out into the playground!
2. Climbing is a great way to help to improve shoulder stability.
3. Swings and slides help with postural control.
4. Walking, or running, up and down unstable surfaces also helps with postural control and endurance.
5. Crawling is also a great way to help with shoulder stability. Tunnels can be fun but if you don't have these, sleeping bags and duvet covers make good substitutes. Chairs and tables can also be used to make obstacle courses.
6. For older children, cycling and gymnastics or martial arts are great. Martial arts and gymnastics have the added bonus of including movements using the left and right sides and both sides together.

## **Essentials 2 – Fine motor skills for handwriting**

### **Finger and hand control**

In order to hold their pencil with their fingers children first need to be able to isolate their fingers from their palm. Initially, when they hold a pencil, a child will grasp their entire hand around it. This is because they have not developed the hand control to isolate their fingers from their palm. As they have more experience with fine motor activities, children establish more control over their fingers. This is what allows them to hold their pencil with their fingers and eventually develop a dynamic pencil grasp. You can read more about pencil grasp development in this article – [What does a good pencil grasp look like?](#)

### **Help a child to develop their finger and hand control**

1. Messy play is a great way to help with hand awareness. Sand, shave foam and finger paint are a good starting point. Mud kitchen can be loads of fun. Cooking can also be fun. Making pizzas or cutting out pastry or biscuits are great ways to develop finger and hand control.
2. Playdough and Dough Disco are also an excellent choice.
3. Finger songs are also a great way to improve the fine motor skills of younger children. There are a number of animated songs on YouTube, [this playlist](#) has a good selection.
4. The song 'Crocodile Snap,' is also written to help children to find their 'crocodile fingers,' or the fingers they need to use on their pencil.
5. Construction toys, are great activities to help with finger and hand control.
6. Musical instruments are brilliant as they help with hand control and timing and sequencing.
7. Scissors and craft are also great choices.
8. Many pretend play toys, e.g. doctor sets, dolls houses, trucks and cars, also encourage fine motor skills.

Sometimes children with fine motor skill delays will avoid these activities. This means they are not developing the required fine motor skills for handwriting success. It can be helpful to prompt these children to engage with them, to ensure they are getting the experiences, especially in FS1.

### **Essentials 3 – Pre-writing skills**

Handwriting is a complex activity. Pre-writing skills are the things a child needs to be able to do before they are ready to write. This includes being able to colour and trace inside lines, and to draw certain shapes. Shapes such as vertical and horizontal lines and circles form the foundation of most letters. Think of the letter 'a' for example. It starts off as a circle, and then has a vertical line on the side. Additionally, a child needs to be able to draw their oblique lines for letters such as 'k,' 'v,' 'w,' and 'x.'

A useful way to think about pre-writing skills is to call it 'mark making.' So, before a child writes they need to be able to use their pencil to make marks and colour. It can be really helpful let the child be as creative as they want to. There are no rules. Old school black boards are also excellent. You just want the child to be holding onto a marker, crayon or pencil and make some marks. This helps with their pencil control.

### **Helping a child with their pre-writing skills**

1. Colouring and drawing are really important foundations for handwriting. These skills help with the pencil control required for handwriting.
2. If a child isn't that interested in colouring, find colouring sheets of their favourite characters. Use different types of markers and crayons.

3. Bath crayons can also be fun, as can window markers to write on windows and mirrors, and drawing with chalk on the pavement.
4. Activity workbooks with mazes and dot to dots are also good at this stage.
5. If you're really struggling to engage a child with a pen and paper you could also try a stylus with a tablet. Just make sure they are using the stylus and not their finger so they are practising holding onto a 'pen.'
6. Practise pre-writing shapes as these are the foundation shapes for handwriting. They include vertical and horizontal lines, circles, squares and oblique lines (\ /) and crosses (+ x). It is important for children to practice pre-writing skills first.

### **Essentials 4 – Visual Perception**

Visual perception is the making sense of what we see. It's much more than having 20/20 vision. It relates to how the brain interprets the information that our eyes see. Before a child can write a letter, they need to be able to identify it. They need to remember what it looks like. This then lets them write it. If you don't know what the letter 'a' looks like, you can't write it. This is why reading is really important as it helps children to start to identify the letters, well before they start to write them. It's much easier to identify a letter and name it than it is to remember and write it. This is also why copying is easier than writing from memory.

#### **Helping a child with visual perception skills**

1. Reading
2. Puzzles
3. Matching games
4. Identifying shapes and letters in the environment (e.g. i-spy)

### **Essentials 5 – Language**

Whilst this may seem like a sideways step, language is also a critical component of handwriting. Like visual perception, if you can't imagine it, or say it, you're really going to struggle to write it.

#### **A few ideas to help with language skills**

1. Talk talk talk!
2. Reading out aloud.
3. Nursery rhymes and songs
4. Tell stories
5. Observe and comment

## Scissor skills

At St Mary's, we allow children to use scissors as soon as they start school, we observe how they are handled and support children in how to correctly hold and use them. We differentiate the level of provision according to the skill they show.

We explain to children that scissors are used whilst sitting, we do not allow children to misuse scissors: e.g. throwing, walking around with them, and pointing them at others. Children learn how to handle scissors safely in the EYFS

### Pre-scissor skills:

This stage is for children who are not yet using or interested in using scissors or pencils and need a bit more practice with general fine motor skills. The activities are designed to help with the hand and finger strength and coordination needed to use scissors. These activities can be used alongside stage one to help with preparedness for cutting.

### **Targets**

1. The child pays visual attention to the object they are holding (i.e. they are looking at the item).
2. The child can actively control the opening and closing of their hand during fine motor activities which use two hands.

### Stage 1 – Learning to snip

**This stage is designed for children who are not able to cut with scissors at all.** These children might use two hands on the scissors and will likely need an adult to hold the paper. The activities are designed to support correct hand position on scissors, holding the paper and snipping. This stage can be used alongside the pre-scissor skills.

### **Targets**

1. The child will hold their scissors with their thumb facing the ceiling.
2. The child will hold onto their paper when cutting 50% of the time.
3. The child can snip paper with scissors.
4. The child can make three cuts in a sequence with scissors.

### Stage 2 – Learning to cut lines and shapes

**This stage is designed for children who have mastered basic snipping skills,** but need to learn to cut on lines and to cut out shapes. The activities start with straight lines but progress towards cutting out a circle. If children are not yet snipping with scissors, they should start at Stage 1.

## Targets

1. The child will hold their paper and scissors with their thumb facing the ceiling 100% of the time.
2. The child can cut along a 15cm x 1cm wide straight line with 100% accuracy.
3. The child can cut out a straight lined shape (square/triangle) drawn from 1cm thick lines with 80% accuracy.
4. The child can cut out a circle drawn from 1cm thick lines with 50% accuracy.

### Stage 3 – Getting creative

**This stage is for children who have mastered basic lines and shapes**, but are ready for more complex shapes and some creativity. The line thickness decreases and the variety of shapes increase. There are many cut and paste activities as well as basic origami folding activities.

## Targets

1. The child can cut out a straight lined shape (square/triangle) drawn from 0.5cm thick lines with 80% accuracy.
2. The child can cut out a circle drawn from 0.5cm thick lines with 75% accuracy.
3. The child can use their scissor skills independently to complete craft activities.


### Stage 4 – More complex cuts

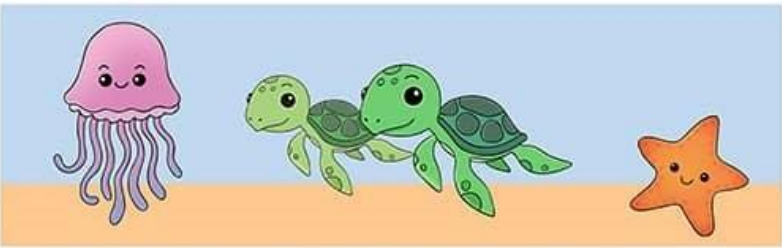

**This stage is designed to further challenge children's cutting skills.** Zig zags and star shapes are included here as they are actually much more complex than they first appear. To take skills even further, there are activities which require the children to cut inside shapes as well.


## Targets

1. The child can cut out shapes with multiple direction lines drawn from 0.2cm thick lines with 80% accuracy.
2. The child can cut out zig zag and star shapes drawn from 0.5 cm thick lines with 75% accuracy, keeping their scissors in continual motion (i.e. they continually turn and reposition their paper, rather than making a series of single cuts to each corner).
3. The child understands how to make cuts inside a shape (e.g. eyes on a mask) and makes a reasonable attempt at the shape.


## Examples of scissor skill progression through EYFS and Year One


 Using your scissors, cut out the seaweed and stick it over the sea creatures.

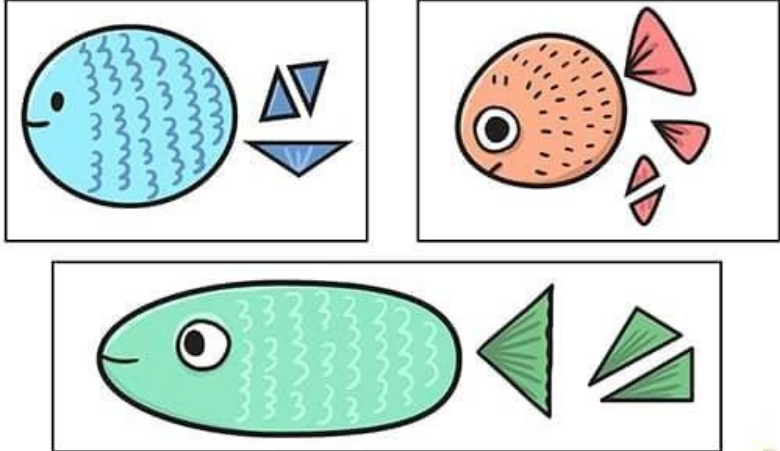






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 Using your scissors, cut out the fish shapes and put them together on another piece of paper.

example: 

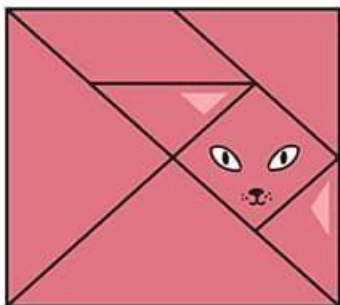




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## TANGRAMS

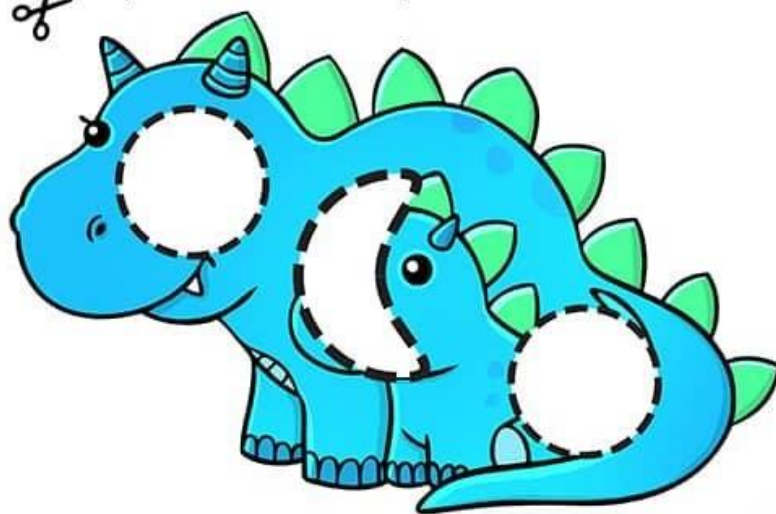
Cut out the shapes in this square then stick them down on another piece of paper to make the cat.



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Use your scissors to cut out the shapes from inside the dinosaurs.

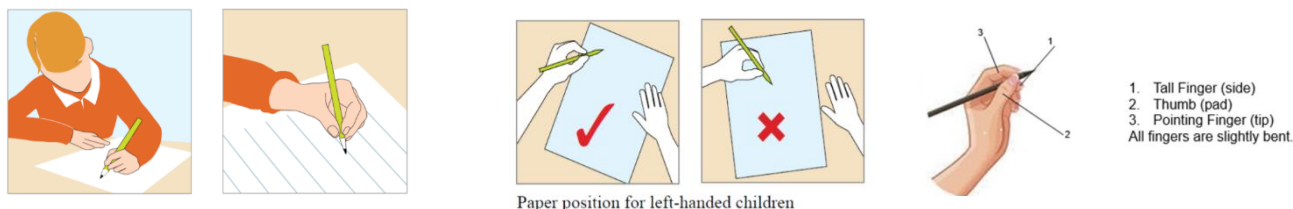


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### **Provision for left handed children**

Left handed children always sit on the left side of right handed children, so their elbows don't bump and knock each other.

They are encouraged to find a comfortable orientation for their paper, usually slightly to the left centre of their body, and to have their fingers about 2-3 cm from the point of their pencil.



### **Resources and writing materials**

Children are given experience of a variety of writing tools.

Pens should be used by those who have achieved a consistent, cursive style. They are to be used from the beginning of Year 5 even if the child has not yet received a pen license.

All children should write in blue ink, using the agreed Nexus pen.

The children are to practise their handwriting in the appropriate book chosen for this specific purpose. Guidelines should be used when writing on plain paper.

### **Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities**

The SENDCO will provide guidance and support for those who have difficulty with fine motor skills – pencil grips, fine motor control programmes and referrals where necessary.

### **Presentation**

Pupils will learn that different levels of presentation are appropriate for different pieces of work and different circumstances. However, pupils are expected to:

- Look after exercise books and not draw or scribble in or on them
- Increasingly plan their work to make it look attractive and well presented
- Not use writing or drawing media that is not approved or not fit for purpose
- Use rulers to draw straight lines and underline all dates, titles and headings
- Set out, number and annotate work appropriately
- At appropriate times, pupils may be encouraged to experiment with alternative means of presenting their work for specific reasons.
- Cross through mistakes or editing alterations with a single line. Erasers should only be used very occasionally and with the express permission of an adult.

Teachers are expected to:

- Ensure that classrooms are well equipped with the essential tools that will assist pupils to create work with a high presentational standard
- Organise the classroom in such a way that materials and resources are easily accessible and systems for their return and maintenance are robust (self-service classroom)



- Ensure that children look after resources and materials so that they learn to respect equipment and good value for money is assured.

The cursive font, with lead-ins, is taught as a specific skill, at least twice a week for about 15 minutes, with additional, individual or group practice where necessary.

When marking or writing comments, members of staff use cursive handwriting as appropriate, using the school's agreed letter formation.



























Teachers model the relevant cursive script on IWB, whiteboards, flip charts etc.

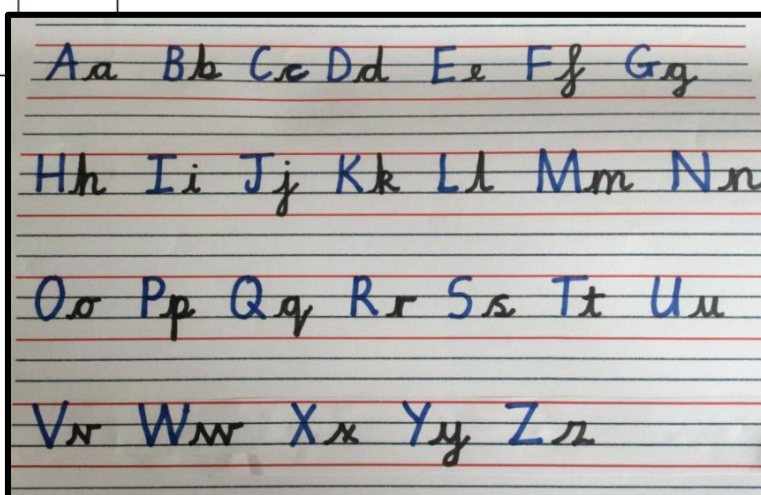
Displays around the school and classroom should model clear joined handwriting as well as other fonts.

The cursive font should be displayed in classrooms to ensure familiarity with the style, alongside other printed and written formats.

### School's agreed letter formation

Rhymes for letter formation - taken from Read Write Inc.

a 	b 	c 	d 	e 	f 
Around the apple and down the leaf.	Down the laces to the heel and around the toe.	Curl around the caterpillar.	Around the dinosaurs bottom, up his tail neck & down to his toes.	Lift off the top and scoop out the egg.	Down the stem and draw the leaves.
g 	h 	i 	j 	k 	l 
Around the girls face, down her hair and give her a curl.	Down the head, to his hooves and over his back.	Down the body and dot for the head.	Down his body, curl, dot for his head.	Down the kangaroo's body tail and leg.	Down the long leg.
m 	n 	o 	p 	qu 	r 
Down Maisie, mountain, mountain.	Down Nobby and over his net.	All around the orange.	Down the pirates pirate and around his face.	Round her head, up past her ear, down her hair and flick.	Down the robots back and curl over his arm.
s 	t 	u 	v 	w 	x 
Slither down the snake.	Down the tower, across the tower.	Down and under, up to the top and draw the puddle.	Down a wing, up a wing.	Down, up, down, up.	Down the arm and leg, repeat the other side.
y 	z 				
Down a horn, up a horn and under head.	Zig-zag-zig.				



### Arrangements for Review

Policies are regularly updated/reviewed by staff and governors to ensure that all aspects of the Handwriting policy aims are being met and the standards of Handwriting are continuing to improve. This policy will be reviewed again by the Leadership team and Handwriting coordinator by May 2024.