

Hillside Primary School

Handwriting Policy

“Handwriting is a very specific man-made activity. Unlike walking, running, eating and climbing it is not a skill humans are innately born with. It is a skill that requires specific instruction” (Griffin 2022)

“ Unless the correct point of entry and direction of stroke for each letter is taught and used from the start, it is progressively difficult to alter the wrong movement pattern that is practised and becomes habitual.” (Sassoon 1995)

Intent

“ Handwriting skills need to be taught both as a timetabled discrete subject and through ongoing reinforcement of skills in everyday written language activities.” (National Handwriting Association 2019)

Statutory requirements

Handwriting is an integral component of the English programmes of study for Key Stages 1 and 2. The programmes describe two dimensions of writing:

- Transcription (spelling and handwriting)
- Composition (articulating ideas and structuring them in speech and writing)

The curriculum demands that teaching should develop competence in *both* dimensions, as writing down ideas fluently depends on effective transcription. This relationship defines the role of handwriting as a *functional tool* in the writing process.

Handwriting requirements are part of the statutory assessments for Writing at the end of Key Stages 1 (Year 2) and Key Stage 2 (Year 6).

The National Curriculum for English places high importance on handwriting but does not provide guidance on **how** it should be taught.

The [National Curriculum programmes of study](#) outline the statutory handwriting outcomes for each year of the curriculum and also provide additional non-statutory guidance.

Implementation

Year One

Pupils should be taught to:

- sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly
- begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place
- form capital letters
- form digits 0-9
- understand which letters belong to which handwriting ‘families’ (ie letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Handwriting requires frequent and discrete, direct teaching. Pupils should be able to form letters correctly and confidently. The size of the writing implement (pencil, pen) should not be too large for a young pupil’s hand. Whatever is being used should allow the pupil to hold it easily and correctly so that bad habits are avoided.

Left-handed pupils should receive specific teaching to meet their needs.

Year Two

Pupils should be taught to:

- form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another
- start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined
- write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower-case letters
- use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should revise and practise correct letter formation frequently. They should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.

Years 3 and 4

Pupils should be taught to:

- use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined
- increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting, [for example, by 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]

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should be using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing. Handwriting should continue to be taught, with the aim of increasing the fluency with which pupils are able to write down what they want to say. This, in turn, will support their composition and spelling.

Years 5 and 6

Pupils 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 writing implement that is best suited for a task

Notes and guidance (non-statutory)

Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task, for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an unjoined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra, and capital letters, for example, for filling in a form.

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But of course developing handwriting skills begins **much earlier** than Year One.

This policy states the core principles of teaching handwriting at Hillside School.

Principle 1 : Children should be taught printing first – single letter shapes with exit flicks (see attached Letter Formation sheet Appendix 1).

The government directive:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phonics-teaching-materials-core-criteria-and-self-assessment/validation-of-systematic-synthetic-phonics-programmes-supporting-documentation>

“At first, children should **not** be taught to join letters or to start every letter ‘on the line’ with a ‘lead-in’, because these practices cause unnecessary difficulty for beginners. Children may be taught to join the letters in digraphs, but this is optional. All resources designed for children to read should be in print.”

Principle 2 :

Phonics and writing require different skills. Phonics relies heavily on visual perception and language processing. Writing requires visual perception and motor skills.

Children will be taught handwriting as a separate skill to reading phonics, but the correct letter formation for graphemes is taught alongside their recognition for reading.

The FFT Success For All daily lesson plan has a writing component.

Principle 3 :

Once children are familiar with the graphemes taught in FFT Phonics they will refine their skills.

They will be taught letters in formation patterns, or families (See Appendix 2 Letter families).

Letter families are groups of letters which are formed with similar motor movements. Practising the same motor movements can help children with letter formation and orientation.

When teaching in phonics groups eg s a t p i n the letters' motor patterns are so varied. (The letter 's' is also one of the hardest letters to write because of the direction changes involved.)

Teach Letter family 1 “ start at the top” l t i j u y

Letter family 2 “ no lifting” r n m h b p k

Letter family 3 “starts like curly c” c o a d g q f s e

Letter family 4 “oblique lines” v w x z

Rationale for these 3 principles

Children who struggle with their writing often

- start their letters in the incorrect position. This can reduce writing fluency and add to orientation confusion.
- segment their letters ie draw the letters in parts. 'n' and 'm' are frequently drawn with the 'hill(s)' and the 'stick' added on afterwards. This also reduces writing fluency and speed.
- have poor sizing and placement of letters on the line.

If children are taught to avoid these errors at the beginning and understand and learn correct letter formations from the outset they won't need to 'unlearn' incorrect patterns.

The FFT phonic scheme includes letter formation, but handwriting is a motor skill also involving visual representation.

For example:

“Slither down the snake” used as an alliteration to help a child learn the letter 's'.

If the child's visual representation of a snake looks like this



then it is a useful guide.

If the child's visual representation of a snake looks like this



then reversal is likely.

If the child's visual representation of a snake looks like this



then no 'slithering down a snake' will help!

Skill Development

There needs to be a clear focus on formation patterns which clearly link to actual movements.

Gross motor skill development, particularly postural control, is essential for fine motor skill development.

Fine motor skills need to be taught in the Early Years and include:

- grasp development
- bilateral integration (**the ability to co-ordinate both sides of the body together**. This ability, and the ability to cross the body midline, indicates that both sides of the brain are working well together and share information efficiently.)
- hand-eye coordination
- pencil grasp and grip
- pre-writing skills
- finger/pencil control

The optimal pencil grasp is the tripod grip where a child holds their pencil with their index finger and middle fingers and thumb. The pencil movement should come from the fingers.

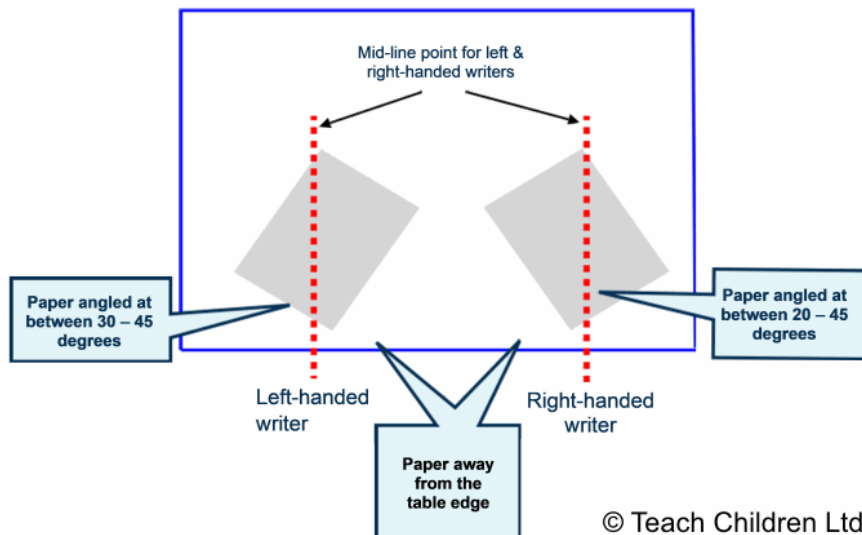
Tripod Grip



Children should be taught the correct posture for writing.



Children should be taught the correct paper/book position.



Visual perception

Visual perception is the brain's ability to understand what it is seeing.

Activities are needed to develop/practise :-

- **discrimination:** the ability to match identical items eg circle the letter 'h' each time on a page
- **figure ground:** the ability to find items in a contrasting background eg locating the 'h' within other letters on a page
- **form constancy:** the understanding that an object can change size or the way it looks but is still the object eg the letter 'b' in different fonts b □ b b
- **visual closure:** the ability to identify an object when you can only see part of it
- **spatial relations:** the ability to identify the direction of the object and its relationship to other objects eg seeing that 'b' and 'd' are vertically flipped
- **visual memory:** the ability to remember what is seen
- **visual sequential memory:** the ability to remember information in order eg remembering the sequence of letters when writing a word
- **visual motor integration:** the ability to combine both visual perception skills and motor skills

Tracing over letters does not require strong visual perception skills, however to write letters children need these skills in place.

Pre-writing shapes

The child needs to be able to draw these shapes in order to form letters. They include the directional movements – horizontal, vertical, diagonal lines and curves; plus corners and intersecting lines - a child needs to be successful at writing.

PRE-WRITING SHAPES

Before your child can learn to write, he or she needs to be able to draw these shapes

	—	○	+	
2 years	2½ years	3 years	3½-4 years	
□	/	\	X	△
4 years	4½ years	4½ years	4 years 11 months	5 years 3 months

Children who can draw an oblique cross are able to copy more letters and numbers than children who cannot

- It is easier for left-handers to draw the oblique line to the right (\) as they can see the endpoint. When drawing to the left (/) they have to visually imagine where to take their pencil as their hand is in the way.

The child should :-

- 1) Imitate the shapes – adult draws shape before and with the child so the child can watch and imitate the movements (they don't have to remember)
If using worksheets then it is important that children watch the adult **first**. Do not use different movements on the same sheet – do not mix straight lines and curves.
- 2) Copy the shapes – the child can look at a pre-drawn shape and make their own without help from an adult.
- 3) Draw the shapes independently – the child needs to **know the name of the shape**, have a **visual representation** of it, and a **movement plan**.

Over time this process becomes automatic.

Moving from pre-writing to letters

Letters are made up of combinations of vertical, horizontal, oblique and curved shapes.

The age when most children can intersect both oblique lines is 4 years and 11 months, therefore several capital letters and the lower case letters 'k (without a curled top), v, w, x' are outside the age norms for many children in the Early Years. In England Reception children are expected to be competent in writing sentences. "Write simple phrases and sentences that can be read by others."

Moving on

It is a good idea to learn to write the digraphs and trigraphs of the English language as joined letters as this helps significantly with the development of their phonics reading skills (particularly if 'sound buttons' are used.) It is also a valuable aid for spelling.

However this can only be taught effectively if the children have learnt the correct letter formation for the letters that make up the digraph/trigraph. It also requires a certain phonic knowledge (at least Phase 3 of Letters and Sounds).

But there will very often be different motor movements within each digraph/trigraph so it is important to choose the correct time for teaching this.

There are many consonant digraphs (not to be confused with consonant blends):- eg ck sh ch th qu ng

And many vowel digraphs:- eg ai ee ie oa ew

And r-controlled digraphs:- eg ar or ir ur

And trigraphs:- eg igh air ure

Joining

If the child has mastered the correct letter formation for all 26 letters then it is an easy step to join them.

Basically the 'flick' or exit stroke from one letter joins to the starting point of the next.

Letters with descenders 'loop' their 'tails' onto the next letter.



There is no need to loop the tail if the letter is the last in the word.

There are four different joins taught in this order:

1. Diagonal join to letters without ascenders

ai ar un in am ear aw ir hu ti ki du up ag

2. Horizontal join to letters without ascenders

ou vi wi op ow ov ri ru ve we re fe fu

3. Diagonal join to letters with ascenders

ab ul it ib if ub th ck ch it

4. Horizontal join to letters with ascenders

ol wh ot ft fl of rt rk ob

We use specially designed and printed exercise books for Key Stage One and Lower Key Stage Two.

Each class displays the letter formation poster.

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Impact

Children will meet the NC requirements for handwriting and the acquisition of this transcription skill will allow the children to fully focus their attention on the

retrieval of knowledge, composition and language choices. There is a 'knock-on' effect in other curriculum areas, which can only be a very positive result.

At Hillside we do not follow a published handwriting scheme, but we have access to



which gives a choice of font style and is closest to the style advocated in this policy.

It has both digital and paper-based resources and could provide valuable support for those staff needing additional guidance.

“Our proven handwriting scheme contains everything you need to teach handwriting easily and effectively within engaging lessons using step-by-step planning on easy-to-follow helpcards, lesson presentations, activity sheets and activity booklets.”

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Aa Bb Cc Dd

Ee Ff Gg Hh Ii

Jj Kk Ll Mm

Nn Oo Pp Qq

Rr Ss Tt Uu Vv

Ww Xx Yy Zz

