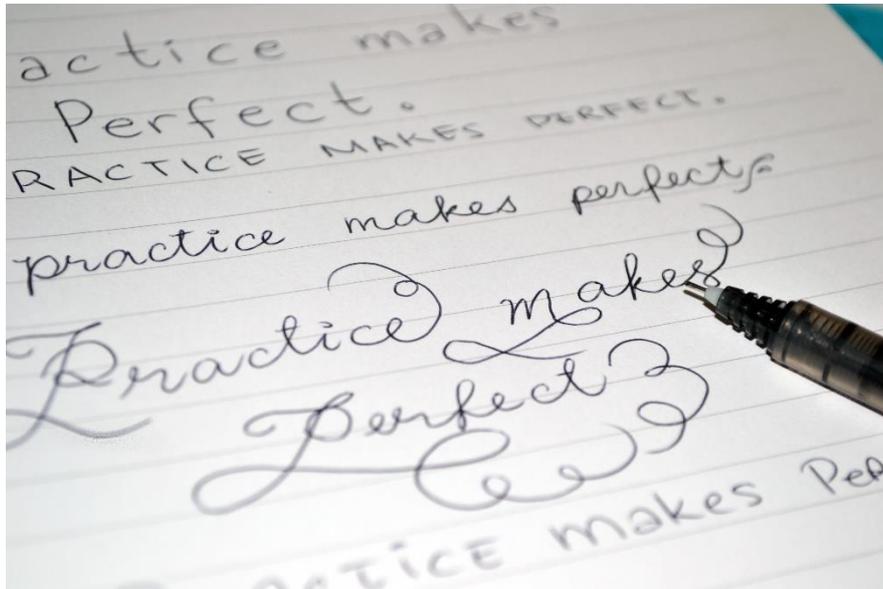


# Handwriting



## Teaching & Learning Guide

Adopted	September 2019
Lead	HH
Reviewed	



## Aims and objectives

A sequential and progressive approach to the teaching of handwriting is important particularly in the lower years of school. At Cottons Farm, our discrete handwriting sessions aim to adopt a consistent approach across school which will enable children to achieve a neat and legible style with correctly formed letters and with increased fluency, proficiency and speed.

Children will master handwriting much quicker when the skill is broken down and they are allocated ample time to learn the fundamental skills. According to research, children experiencing handwriting difficulties tend to have lower achievement, lower verbal IQ and have greater attention difficulties than their peers (Sandler et al., 1992) and these impairments have been linked to reduced working memory capacity and lower reading and spelling scores ([McCarney, Peters, Jackson, Thomas, & Kirby, 2013](#)). Evidence suggests that many difficulties with handwriting will be helped with quality first teaching and regular practice, together with maturation of the child (Santangelo and Graham, 2016).

## Handwriting sessions

### Writing in the Early Years

Skills for handwriting can be introduced from a very early stage however the development of gross and fine motor skills is paramount. Fine motor skills require a high degree of control and precision in the small muscles of the hand and gross motor skills use the large muscles in the body.

Writing develops as children display a desire to communicate through mark making and develop an increased control of their motor skills. When children are making early marks, they are practising to hold a pencil and are attempting to control their marks with their muscles. Once children have had plenty of experience in drawing

letter shapes without constraints, they can then move onto using pencils on smaller



sheets of paper where they are ready to be taught pre-writing patterns. The 'Write from the start' programme in school, provides a selection of pre-writing activities which may assist with this.

### Activities to support Gross and Fine Motor Skills

Children should be provided with regular opportunities to extend their abilities, and room should be provided where they can move around freely within the indoor and the outdoor learning environment. Activities which may be typically provided to encourage the development of fine motor skills within the lower years of school may include:-

- Lacing and threading beads
- Tracing pictures
- Malleable materials such as play, dough and plasticine
- Banging with a wooden hammer
- Cutting skills
- Jigsaws
- Squeezing pegs onto a washing line
- Using tweezers to pick up small objects
- Small construction equipment
- Painting and collage activities
- Sticking with glue
- Sand and water play with equipment for pouring, filling and emptying containers
- Buttoning clothes and fastening zips
- Popping bubble wrap
- Running, skipping, jumping, dancing
- Throwing beanbags
- Kicking or catching balls
- Digging
- Pedalling bikes
- Balancing, climbing and swinging



## Handwriting Sessions

Effective teaching of handwriting can only be achieved through modelling. Teachers must demonstrate formation regularly therefore daily discrete handwriting sessions will be necessary. When thoroughly learned, children will be able to transfer across this learning into 'everyday' use and their handwriting will become faster and more automatic. A short modelling session will be provided by the Class Teacher (approximately 5 mins) and then the children will be required to return to their seats to begin practise on lined paper. It will be necessary for the teacher to circulate around the room in order to monitor correct posture, ensure a good pencil grip is maintained and correct formation is established as bad habits are much more difficult to eradicate at a later stage.

## Essential Habits

It is most important for handwriting lessons that desks are free from clutter, chairs are tucked in and there is adequate lighting. Good posture and correct seating are vital components. Chairs and tables should be at a comfortable height so that forearms can rest comfortably on the table and chair legs and children's feet should be flat on the floor. The paper should be sloped and steadied with the non-writing hand as shown in Figure 1. This will help children to see what they are writing and make it easier for their writing hand to move across the page.



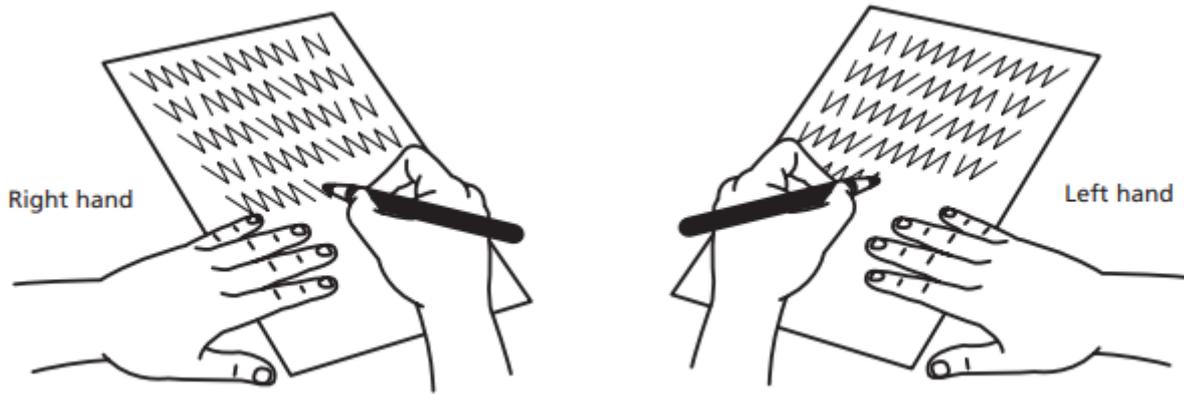


Figure 1

It is anticipated that short bursts of handwriting practice will provide improvements in legibility and speed and this will increase handwriting fluency and an increased quality of overall writing composition due to freed up cognitive capacity.

### Teaching Sequence

When beginning to teach handwriting, it is often useful to teach letters in family groups. This helps emphasise the right to left direction of our writing system, prevents the reversal of letters and allows children to practice the fluency of movement for a collection of letters. There are several different ways of grouping letters into families. Each day will begin with a different family of letters and this will be practiced over the half termly cycle:-

Monday (long ladder): letters i, j, l, t, u, v, w

Tuesday (one-armed robot): letters b, h, k, m, n, p, r;

Wednesday (curly caterpillar) letters: c, a, d, e, g,

Thursday (curly caterpillar) letters: o, q, f, s;

Friday (zigzag letters) letters: v, w, x, z;



Each lesson is intended to last between 10 – 15 minutes. If this level of intensity is maintained, a dramatic rise in standards will be seen very rapidly. Class Teachers should use their discretion as to where handwriting practise should be recorded however it is suggested that a good idea may be to provide children with a pre-printed document which presents the family of letters to be practised that day, although practise in a separate writing book or in the back of current class writing books would also be sufficient.

At Cottons Farm, handwriting sessions begin in Year 1 with a printed script, the evidence for which will be discussed later. When selecting this font on a computer, 'CCW Precursive 1' should be used (see Appendix 1 for example) and handwriting guide - lines '03' should be utilised for daily practise.

When a child has secured the movements of each letter accurately and thoroughly mastered correct formation, lead-in strokes can be introduced (XCCW Joined 1a - Appendix 1), again using the teaching sequence as shown previously and handwriting guide-lines '03'. This often begins in Year 2 but is dependent on the current attainment of the child.

When accurate formation of lead in strokes are secured, children should be moved onto smaller handwriting guide-lines (04). The previous series of letter families should be repeated until the child is ready to begin to join pairs of letters together, as follows:-

Monday - 'up, over, stop, reverse' - la, co, ac, ng, eq, us

Tuesday - 'join across the top' - fi, wa, on, vy

Wednesday - 'join from preceding' - ab, th, ck, if, il

Thursday - 'join from preceding' - em, ip, lu, kn, ar, ky

Friday - 'join from preceding' - tw, iv, ex, uz

After working through the second programme of lessons, three letter joins could be introduced in the daily handwriting lessons and if further practise is



deemed necessary, this may include copying words, spellings or sentences.

### Model in the classroom

A model of the expected handwriting should be visible in the classroom. Staff's handwriting (marking, comments in books and handwritten signs on boards or displays) should follow the model proposed in this policy.

### Pencil/pen

All children should write with a pencil that is reasonably sharp. Some children may require the use of pencil grips or chunky pencils and for those with poor pressure, a darker pencil (B) is suggested. Children will be able to earn a pen licence once their handwriting is thoroughly mastered and this is often seen towards the end of Year 2 or within the start of Year 3.

### Children who struggle with correct orientation on the lines

If to begin with, you find that children struggle with where to place their handwriting, it may be useful to highlight the middle portion of the lines. This visual then becomes very clear and makes it readily apparent when a letter creeps out of this space and towards the upper part of the line.

### The evidence for and against the need for cursive writing in EYFS

Many schools advocate the practice of fully cursive with "lead in" or "entry" strokes from Reception age so that children do not have to alter movement patterns at a later stage. Whilst this model sounds plausible there is no conclusive evidence to support that schemes which use "lead in" strokes and fully cursive writing are in any way superior to those in which letters start at the top and end with an exit stroke. Although "lead in strokes" are taught widely in many European countries, it must be remembered that there is an important age difference for when formal writing is introduced, i.e. at around 7



years of age, as opposed to 4–5 years in England.



Research evidence from the National Handwriting Association (2017) states that Handwriting is a complex skill that is dependent upon the maturation and integration of a number of cognitive, perceptual and motor skills. Achievement to write well places many demands on skills involving the eyes, arms, hands, memory, posture and body control as well as managing pencil, paper and following instructions. Many children find this very challenging. When children are rushed prematurely to join, this often ignores the signs of unreadiness and may leave a legacy of handwriting problems that will be difficult to reverse at a later stage.

Writing is acquired in a developmental fashion. First a child begins to scribble and colour in, then they master copying and drawing the following forms prior to being able to adequately grasp letter formation. These strokes include the following: - |, —, O, +, /, square, \, X, and Δ. If a child cannot draw these basic shapes then it is likely they will have difficulties forming letters and numbers. Similarly, children who display delayed development are very likely to struggle with the demands of joining before they are developmentally ready.

This is supported by the findings of the Bold Beginnings document (2017). Headteachers interviewed agreed that children needed to be able to form all letters correctly and consistently before joined-up cursive or pre-cursive handwriting was introduced. They believed that joined up writing slowed down children's writing, at a point when they already found manual dexterity tricky and the muscles in their shoulders, arms and hands were still developing.



## Handwriting problems

There is solid evidence base from health clinics that there are large numbers of children in schools who struggle with fine motor skills and consequently have poor handwriting (Preston et al, 2017). The prevalence of such problems is higher among pupils who are socio-economically disadvantaged (Liu et al, 2015). Children who experience difficulties should be brought to the attention of the SENCo. On rare occasions it may be necessary to consult outside Occupational Therapy support however most children will respond well to Quality First teaching, repetition and reinforcement of handwriting skills.

Should ongoing problems occur, a baseline assessment of skills will be made in school using an intervention called 'Active Hands' which will assess whether a programme of intervention is required. If this is deemed necessary, a child will receive daily intervention support for a duration of 20 minutes over a period of 12 weeks and this will establish the need to refer onto additional outside agency support. Intervention programmes commonly recommended by Occupational Therapists and used in school are:-

Write from the start

Speed Up

Start write, Stay write

## Provision for left-handed children

Be aware of the difficulties experienced by left-handed children. Paper should be tilted to the right and the right hand used to steady the paper. Positioning is important – a left-handed child should be seated on the left-hand side of a double desk because otherwise it is

likely that their elbows will collide with other

right-handed writers. It may be useful to

put a mark on the left-hand side of the



paper to indicate where the writing begins as some left-handed children will often mirror write backwards from the right. Sloping boards ensure that left-handers cannot hook above the paper.

