

St Mary's CE Primary School

Handwriting & Presentation Policy

Introduction & Aims

"Our Christian vision is for all our children and community to flourish together and enable others to do the same, using their talents and gifts to serve and support others, encouraging a sense of care and responsibility to others and the world."

1. Introduction & Rationale

At St Mary's CE Primary School, we view handwriting not merely as a surface presentation skill, but as an essential, foundational tool that enables every child to flourish. Being able to write with legibility, fluency, and speed unlocks a child's ability to share their unique talents, communicate their ideas clearly, and serve others through effective expression.

"Good handwriting is not just a presentation perk which is applied to the surface of school work; it is inextricably interwoven with the total learning and sense-making process that should constitute a child's schooling." — Smith (1977)

National Curriculum & Strong Foundations

Our policy is built on the requirements of the National Curriculum and reflects the Government's focus on Strong Foundations in early education. Research shows that explicitly teaching physical control, pencil grip, and correct letter formation in the early years frees up working memory. When transcription becomes automatic, children are able to focus their cognitive energy on higher-level composition, vocabulary, and creative thought.

Furthermore, handwriting fluency plays a direct role in long-term academic confidence and spelling accuracy:

"Students who can write quickly achieve up to a grade higher at GCSE regardless of academic ability. Slow handwriters also tend to be poor spellers." — Teacher Training Agency (2004)

Inclusivity & Caring for Every Learner

In keeping with our Christian vision to support and care for one another, we recognise that explicit handwriting instruction is a matter of educational equity. For pupils with Special Educational Needs and Dyslexia, a structured, joined handwriting approach reduces cognitive load and aids memory:

“Joining the letters is desirable for all but essential for the dyslexic pupil. He is likely to confuse any printed shape, so in teaching him to make separate printed shapes his problems are increased.” — Kathleen Hickey (2007)

“For children with learning difficulties, good handwriting is crucial because it is linked with reading and spelling.” — Ramsden (1992)

By establishing high expectations and a progressive curriculum from EYFS to Key Stage 2, we ensure all pupils develop the confidence, pride, and skill needed to flourish academically and socially.

2. Policy Aims

For Teachers

To ensure high-quality delivery and consistent practice across the entire school, teachers will:

- **Know the correct style, letter formations, and joins** in handwriting to maintain consistency across all year groups and key stages.
- **Understand the progression in handwriting** so that explicit skills are taught in every dedicated lesson, ensuring pupils’ handwriting continuously develops and improves over time.
- **Maintain high expectations** during discrete handwriting sessions and ensure pupils are expected and supported to apply those same high standards across all independent, cross-curricular writing.

For Pupils

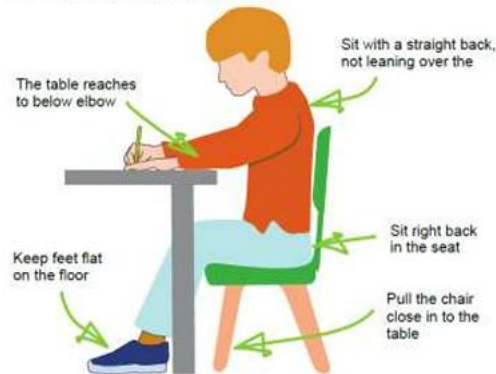
Through our structured handwriting curriculum, we aim for all pupils:

- **To know the importance of clear and neat presentation** in order to communicate their meaning effectively to an audience.
- **To write legibly in both joined and printed styles with increasing fluency and speed**, achieving this by:
 - Developing and maintaining a correct pencil grip.
 - Eventually knowing that all letters can be joined from the bottom
 - Forming all letters, numbers, and mathematical digits correctly.
 - Developing a firm understanding of the relative size, proportion, and orientation of letters and digits.

Teaching time

- **EYFS little and often but closely supervised.**
- **Years 1 and 2 at least 3 weekly sessions lasting no more than 10 minutes.**
- **Years 3 and 4- at least one 15 minute session a week.**
- **Year’s 5 and 6- at least one 15 minute session a week.**

SITTING POSITION



For right handers

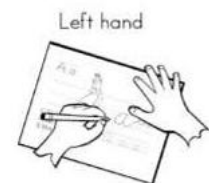
- Hold lightly between the thumb and forefinger about 3cm away from the point
- The paper should be placed to the right tilted slightly to the left
- Use the left hand to steady the paper



Right corners of paper are up.
Bottom left corner points toward your body.

For left handers

- Hold lightly between thumb and forefinger resting on the first knuckle of the middle finger
- Hold about 3cm from the tip but some children may need to grip a little further away from the tip so that the writing is not obscured by the thumb knuckle.
- The hand should be kept below the writing line although some pupils will find a 'hook' more comfortable
- The paper should be tilted slightly to the right at about 20 - 30° and pushed about 5cm away from the body to prevent 'hooking' of the hand which is caused by the left elbow 'locking' into the side of the body.
- Use the right hand to steady the paper



Left corners of paper are up.
Bottom right corner points toward your body.

Our approach:

While research and professional debate surrounding handwriting instruction offer varied perspectives—with national guidance cautioning against premature forced joining—we recognise that transitioning abruptly from top-down print to joined cursive can create unnecessary cognitive friction. To support children's long-term writing confidence, our staff model letters with a consistent lead-in stroke from Nursery through Key Stage 1. Crucially, we treat early handwriting as a natural developmental process: young children are encouraged to explore letter formation freely, without the pressure of forced joins. It is only in Year 2, when fine-motor skills and phonics knowledge are well-established, that we formally guide pupils to connect these movements into a secure, fluid style. By

embedding one familiar motor plan from the start, we reduce cognitive load, prevent letter reversals, and give every child—especially those building foundational handwriting fluency—the time and scaffolding they need to succeed.

Progression:

Initial Stage

m, a, s, d, t, i, n, p, g, o, c, k, u, b, f, e, l, h, r, j, v, y, w, z, x, qu

M, A, S, D, T, I, N, P, G, O, C, K, U, B, F, E, L, H, R, J, V, Y, W, Z, X, QU

Retracing

m, n, r, h, b, p, k - c, a, d, g, o, q, e, s, f - l, i, t, u, j, y

v, w, x, z, qu

Joining

sh, th, ch, qu, ng, nk, ay, ee, igh, ow, oo, ar, or, air, ir, ou, oy

d b (to avoid reversal)

in, it, at, an, am, is, up, sh, th, ch, ck, ng, nk, qu

ay, ee, igh, ow, oo, ar, or, air, ir, ou, oy

ea, oi, a-e, i-e, o-e, u-e, aw, are, ur, er, ow, ai, oa, ew

Modelling:

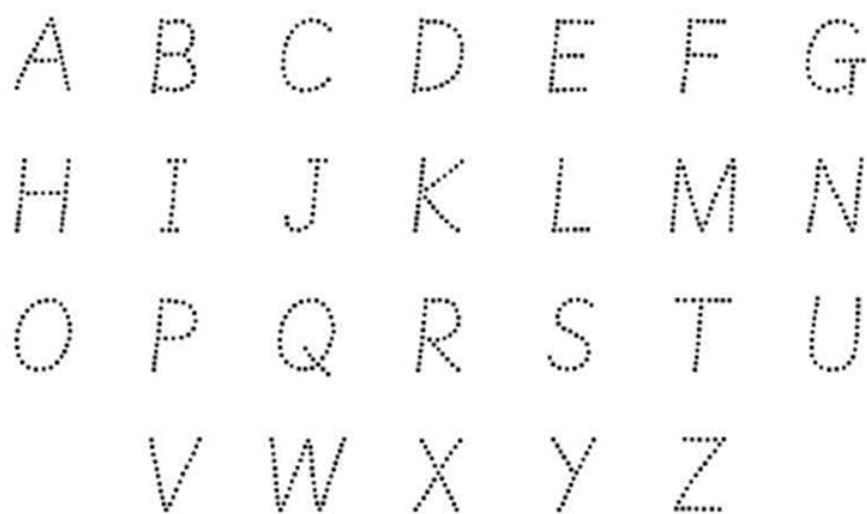
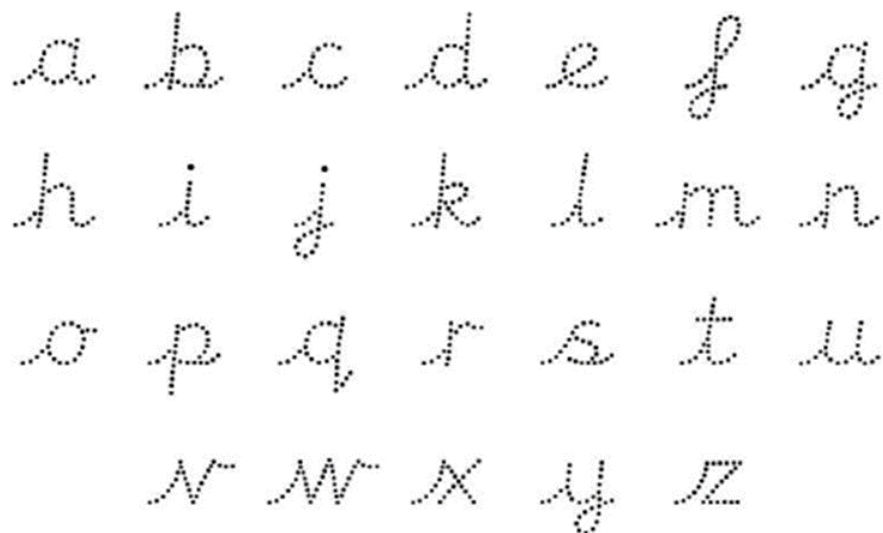
Adult modelling is essential when teaching handwriting; therefore, **staff must remain attentive and present to intervene early**, ensuring incorrect habits are caught before motor memory takes hold. To reduce cognitive load and visual-spatial strain, instruction balances far-point board demonstrations with near-point desk models. We provide targeted, adaptive support for pupils who find handwriting challenging, ensuring provision is mindfully tailored to accommodate individual needs, including dyslexia, dysgraphia, physical fine-motor difficulties, and processing differences.

Assessment:

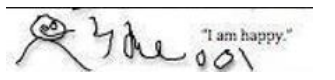
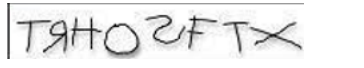
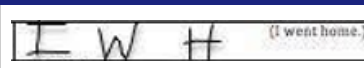
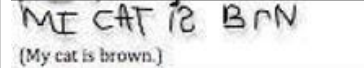
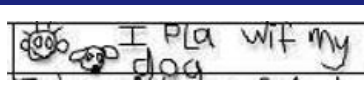
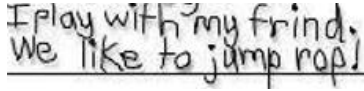
- Robust assessment and regular monitoring are critical to ensuring every pupil acquires a fluid style of handwriting and receives targeted support—both during and outside of dedicated handwriting sessions—if they face challenges.
- To maintain consistency across all writing throughout the curriculum, practical feedback must guide pupil progress.

- This begins in Nursery where writing progression is monitored enabling a good transition into Reception Class. Assessment continues throughout Key stage 1 and into Year 3, where teachers assess to ensure pupils start letters correctly before attempting joins. Year 3-6 staff will build on assessment and ensure consistency of handwriting and support pupils as required.
- Using professional judgment alongside year-end expectations, teachers determine precise starting points, while the Senior Leadership Team regularly monitors workbooks across all subjects as part of the scheduled monitoring cycle to ensure high standards are sustained.

Letter formation :



Developmental Stages of Writing

Pre-Literate	
Scribble Stage - starting point any place on page, resembles drawing large circular strokes and random marks that do not resemble print or communicate a message	
Symbolic Stage - starting point any place on page, pictures or random strokes/marks with an intended message	
Directional Scribble - scribble left to right direction, linear, intended as writing that communicates a meaningful message/idea	
Symbolic/Mock Letters - letter-like formations, may resemble letters but it isn't intentional, interspersed with numbers, spacing rarely present	
Emergent	
Strings of Letters - long strings of various letters in random order, may go left to right, uses letter sequence perhaps from name, usually uses capital letters, may write same letters in many ways.	
Groups of letters - groupings of letters with spaces in between to resemble words	
Labeling pictures - matching beginning sounds with the letter to label a picture	
Environmental Print - copies letters/words from environmental/classroom print, reversals common, uses a variety of resources to facilitate writing	
Transitional	
Letter/Word Representation - uses first letter sound of word to represent entire word, uses letter sound relationship.	
First/Last Letter Representation - word represented by first and last letter sound	
Medial Letter Sounds - words spelled phonetically using BME sounds, attempts medial vowels, uses some known words, more conventionally spelled words, one letter may represent one syllable, attempts to use word spacing, writing is readable	
Fluent	
Beginning Phrase Writing - using all of the above skills to construct phrases that convey a message connected to their illustration	
Sentence Writing - Construction of words into sentence formation, maybe multiple sentences, writing is readable, may use punctuation, known words spelled correctly, topic focused, BME with detail.	
Six Traits of Writing - Students use Six Traits of Writing (Conventions, Organisation, Voice, Ideas, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency)	



FISTED GRIP
1-2 years old

Children often hold their writing tool like a dagger, scribbling using their whole arm.



OR



DIGITAL PRONATE GRIP
2-3 years old

All fingers are holding the writing tool but the wrist is turned so that the palm is facing down towards the page. Movement now comes mostly from the elbow. Children should start being able to copy a horizontal, vertical and circular line.



4 FINGER GRIP
3-4 years old

4 fingers are held on the writing tool. Movement is mostly from the wrist and the hand and fingers move as one.



STATIC TRIPOD GRIP
4-6 years old

This is a 3 finger grasp, where the thumb, index finger and middle finger work as one unit.



DYNAMIC TRIPOD GRIP
By 6 or 7 years old

Using only 3 fingers to hold the writing tool. This is the ideal grip to help move the pencil efficiently, accurately.