

Importance and nature of handwriting

Handwriting is a fundamental skill that provides children with the tools to express themselves. At Wheatfields, we recognise the need for children to develop a neat fluent style so that they are able to communicate in writing fluently and clearly. We aim to make handwriting an automatic process that does not interfere with creative thinking. This meets the school aims as it allows pupils to strive for excellence and take pride in their work.

Aims and objectives

Aims of policy:

- To present clear guidelines for the teaching of handwriting
- To ensure teaching expectations are consistent through explicit teaching
- To provide a consistent language for teaching letter formation
- To use handwriting as an aid to spelling success

Outcomes for learners:

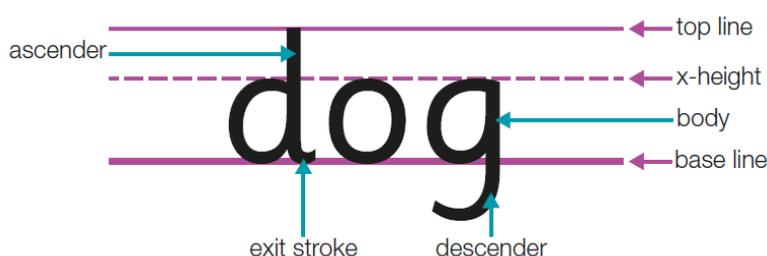
- Can produce and maintain a good writing speed
- Have fluent hand movements that are comfortable to maintain
- Letters are of a consistent and appropriate size, positioned correctly
- Handwriting is legible

The handwriting scheme used in school

There are regular timetabled lessons each week for handwriting, to ensure that children can build upon their skills. The frequency and length of these varies according to their age. Approximately daily in Early Years, KS1 three times weekly, KS2 twice weekly minimum, alongside specific interventions. Children need to practice handwriting **under the guidance of a teacher** so they do not develop habits that will be difficult to undo later.

It is crucial that all staff use a clear, consistent set of instructions for describing the correct letter formation. Teachers will explicitly demonstrate the formation of letters and observe individuals whilst they practice. Children might verbalise as they write. The school's set of instructions is given in **Appendix 1 - Instructions for correct number and letter formation**.

We teach in a specific order using the letter families, based on similar movements, see **Appendix 2 – Order of teaching**. Ascenders extend above the body of a letter and descenders extend below the body of a letter. We write on the base line, practicing in handwriting books which also have the x-height for support when learning. We ensure children have many opportunities to practise the skills of handwriting across the curriculum, where we write without the extra x-height lines.



We teach letter formation initially as lower case print before progressing to joins. Joining is introduced in Year 2 at Wheatfields and/or once children can confidently form and write letters correctly. Joined writing helps pupils write

more, increasing the speed of writing and fluency and supports spelling, as research has shown that seeing words as a whole, rather than a series of isolated letters can support children in memorising and spelling words correctly.

We do not lead-in to letters in continuous cursive, but specifically teach the horizontal, vertical and diagonal joins between letters. Diagonal strokes join from letters which finish on the baseline. Horizontal strokes join from letters which finish at the top. Joins between letters increase the speed, rhythm and ease of writing without reducing legibility. See **Appendix 3 – Teaching of Joins**.

There are specific **break letters**, which do not join. These are b g j p q x y z

Handwriting progression

In order for handwriting to be successful, teaching must build upon the skills acquired in previous years and follow a clear progression.

In the early stages of learning to write, the process is more important than the product.

- Irregular letter forms starting in the correct place with movement in the correct direction are to be preferred to uniformly regular letters achieved through wrong movements.
- Every effort should be made to prevent significant faults becoming ingrained habits that will be difficult to break.

Common faults include:

- faulty pencil/pen grip
- incorrect letter formation
- reversals and inversions
- poor posture and paper positioning

Preschool Expectations

In preschool writing we work on learning the basic visual and motor skills needed for writing. They use the following ideas to reinforce the teaching of letter shapes:

- Encourage children to form letters by drawing them in the air.
- Finger trace over tactile letters, on desk or table tops.
- Write over dotted or 'shadow' writing with supervision
- Draw round templates.
- Write in sand with a finger or stick.
- Write with chalk on a chalkboard.
- Write letters boldly with a wax candle and then apply a colour wash.
- Form letters with pegs on a pegboard or with beads.
- Finger trace the outline of a letter on the back of the person in front of you.
- Form letters with fingers and/or bodies, individually and in groups.

EYFS

In Early Years Foundation Stage children will be involved in a variety of activities to develop their gross and fine motor control. Alongside teaching letter formation, children are taught pre-writing skills (zig-zags, loops, patterns etc.), finger and hand strengthening.

Pupils should be taught to:

- Have the correct pencil grip
- Have a solid understanding of correct letter formation
- Use correct letter formation when writing and write letters on a line
- To form lower case and capital letters, although this may not be fully established
- To form digits 0-9

- *Children should be able to write three or more simple statements on a given subject that can be read without the child's help and that make sense, although letter shapes and spelling may not be fully accurate.*

Year 1

Pupils should be taught to:

- Sit correctly, and hold a pencil comfortably and correctly
- To form lower-case letters starting and finishing in the right place using ascenders and descenders
- Understand which letters belong to which handwriting 'families' and practise them
- Use finger spaces between words
- *Sustain handwriting for a paragraph or more, that can be read without help from the child. Produce letter shapes, which are mainly accurate.*

Year 2

Pupils should be taught to:

- Form lower-case and capital letters of the correct size relative to one another, including appropriate spacing
- Use diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined
- Join letters at the discretion of the teacher
- *Produce close to a side (or more) of A4 handwriting that is clear and consistent.*

Years 3 and 4

Pupils should be taught to:

- Increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting, including sufficient spacing so that ascenders and descenders do not touch
- Use joined handwriting consistently across the curriculum
- Be given the opportunities to write in pen before being awarded their pen license
- *In Year 3 - Produce close to a side (or more) of A4 handwriting that is clear, consistent and joined.*
- *In Year 4 - Produce more than a side of A4 handwriting that is clear and consistent.*

Years 5 and 6

Pupils should be taught to:

- Write legibly and fluently with increasing speed and choosing the correct writing implement
- Choose the writing implement that is best suited to the task

In Key Stage 1 we expect the children to write on every line, as their exercise books have larger line spacing.

In Key Stage 2 we expect the children to write a line and miss a line, for editing.

The process of handwriting – P Checks

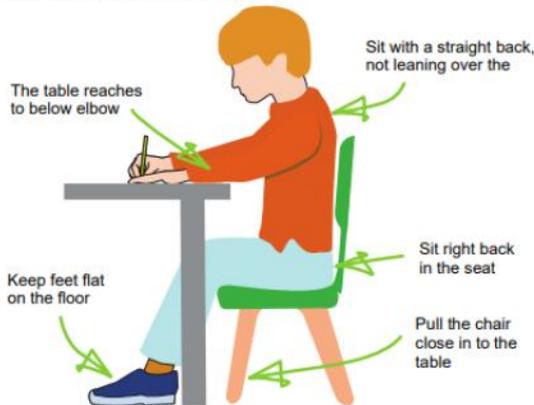
The four 'P's:

- posture
- pen hold
- paper position
- pressure

Posture

Children will need to maintain a stable, comfortable position to support the process of handwriting. All pupils should be taught to sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly. Teachers will ensure that children are seated in a way that allows them to write comfortably, this includes careful seating of children who are left handed.

SITTING POSITION



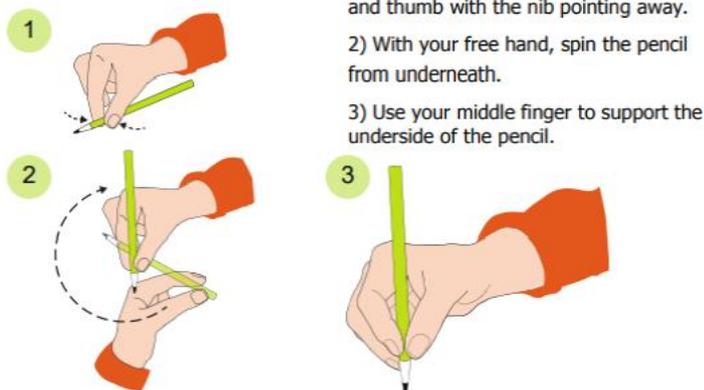
When sitting at a desk - it is important to ensure that their sitting position and table height is correct for them. The table should support the forearm so that it rests lightly on the surface and is parallel to the floor. Children should be encouraged to sit up straight and not to slouch, their back should be supported by their chair. The height of the chair should be such that the thighs are horizontal and the feet flat on the floor (or supported on a step). Hips, knees and ankles should be at right angles and the tummy should be about a fist's distance from the table. Tables should be free of clutter and there should be adequate light to allow children to see what they are doing. Eyes should be a ruler's length away from their paper. Ideally, left-handed pupils should sit on the left of their partners so that their movements are not restricted.

Pen hold

The pencil is held between thumb and forefinger, resting on the first knuckle of the middle finger. The pencil should be held about 2-3cm from the tip. The grip should be supported by a stable wrist, resting on the desk. The hand should be kept below the writing line. This enables the children to see what they are writing and encourages correct pen hold.

THE TRIPOD PENCIL GRIP

Both right and left handed children should be encouraged to use the tripod grip which allows the pen/pencil to be held securely whilst allowing controlled movements of the pen/pencil nib.

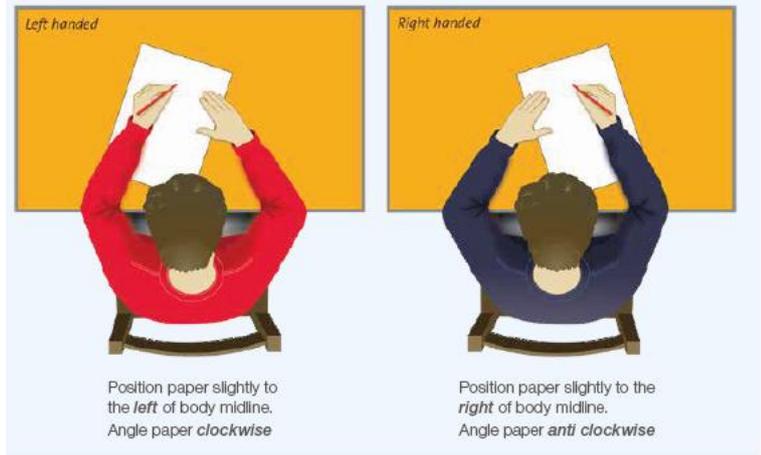


There are other effective grips that suit individuals and we can adapt using a wider choice of pencils, pens and pencil grips. As children become older it becomes increasingly difficult to change their grip. Generally – if the grip is causing pain, discomfort or fatigue, or is seriously affecting legibility, then seek advice. If not, it should be left alone in older students.

Paper position

The book or writing paper should be placed to the right, tilted slightly parallel to the writing arm at a comfortable distance from the edge of the table. Not directly in front of but slightly offset. The left hand should be used to steady the paper. The paper or book should be slowly moved upwards as the writing moves down the page.

For younger children this may still be on a vertical surface allowing them to make big movements in-line with their pencil grip stage.



Pressure

When children are learning to write, pencil pressure is likely to vary depending on the demands of the task, stage of development and the tools being used. Ideally, the pressure should leave a clear trace on the paper, neither too faint nor too dark and flow along the line rhythmically. Most children will learn through experimentation; however difficulties in this can lead to irregularity in handwriting quality. Teachers will need to discuss the importance of pressure explicitly with their class, observing what is happening with the whole body.

Provision for left-handed writers

Pen hold

The left-handed needs to be shown as early as possible how to hold a writing implement correctly. Bad habits are easily learnt and many left-handers adopt a hooked pencil hold which can result in a tired grip and affect the quality of their writing. When they begin to use a pen their hand can easily smudge the ink as they write.

If a child already has a 'hooked' pencil hold, do not force them to change. It is very difficult to alter the way you have learnt to hold a pencil, and confidence can easily be destroyed. Encourage them *instead* to angle their paper 8° to the left, i.e. the same angle used for a right-handed child. If possible, demonstrate how to hold a pen and how to form and join letters with your left hand.

The left-hander should hold the pencil in the left hand in the same way as a right-handed person holds theirs. The pencil is held between thumb and forefinger, resting on the first knuckle of the middle finger. The pencil should be held about 3cm from the tip. The hand should be kept below the writing line. This enables the children to see what they are writing and encourages correct pen hold. The grip the left-hander uses means the pencil is pushed as the child writes, whereas the right-hander pulls their pencil across the page as they write. It is important therefore that the left-hander's pencil is not too sharp, so that it will run smoothly across the page.

Paper position

The left-hander will find it easier if the paper is tilted slightly to the right, at about 8°. The higher the angle the harder it is for most children to write efficiently. The right hand is used to steady the paper, above the writing line.

Crossing letters

The left-hander often crosses the 'f' and 't' from right to left. Many left-handers therefore will find it easier to leave the 'f' unjoined.

Classroom organisation

Teachers need to be aware of left-handers in the classroom as they do have different needs. It is very important that a right-handed child is not seated on the left-hand side of a left-handed child as their elbows will collide.

Practical Support Ideas

- a higher seat

- a sloped writing surface
- good lighting (so the writing hand does not cast a shadow on the writing)
- pencils and pens to suit ergonomic grip

Assessment of handwriting

Formative assessment - will be completed in the form of monitoring and observation throughout the explicit teaching in handwriting sessions, using early identification to adjust and prevent significant faults becoming ingrained habits that will be difficult to break. Irregular letter forms starting in the correct place with movement in the correct direction are to be preferred to uniformly regular letters achieved through wrong movements. Teachers will regularly check back to the **handwriting assessment tracker (Appendix 4)** for the year group to inform teaching and children identified with specific handwriting difficulties will then have additional support and possible interventions.

Summative assessment – at the end of each year teachers will refer to the handwriting assessment tracker for the year group to **inform part of their overall judgement in writing**. Exceptions will be made for individuals.

Supporting children with handwriting difficulties

Some problems and possible solutions

Faulty pencil grip

An over-tight pencil grip is the most common fault. Crooking of the forefinger and pressing too hard are common indications of this. Encourage the pupil to relax and to hold the pencil lightly between their thumb and their middle finger, while their forefinger rests lightly on the pencil.

Incorrect letter formation

Children are often able to write letters which are correctly shaped but which have been produced by incorrect movements. If bad habits of this kind are allowed to become ingrained, the child will be seriously hampered when he or she progresses to joined writing.

It is important, in the early stages of development, to ensure that:

- all letters are started in the correct place
- in general, movements start at the top and go down
- ovals are made with an anticlockwise movement.

Reversal, inversions and mirror writing

Common problems include:

- reversal: b for d and p for q
- inversions: w for m
- mirror writing: was for saw.

Causes include:

- confusion between left and right
- a lack of commitment to one hand
- a natural tendency for left-handers to pull the hand across the body from right to left
- a general lack of maturity or confidence.

Children with these problems can be supported with an increased emphasis on writing direction and the consistent use of one hand for writing.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Instructions for correct number and letter formation

Number Audio

- 0 Start at the top and go round.
- 1 Start at the top and go down.
- 2 Start at the top, curve round and down, and across.
- 3 Start at the top. Go round, and round.
- 4 Start at the top. Go down, across, lift your pencil and go down.
- 5 Start at the top. Go down, and round. Lift your pencil up to the top, and across.
- 6 Start at the top right. Curve down, up, and in till you touch.
- 7 Start at the top, across, and diagonally down.
- 8 Start at the top, go round, and curve back the other way, and up, cross, and up till you touch.
- 9 Start near the top. Go round, up and down.

Lower case letters

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

Upper case letters

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

Digits

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Lower case letters

Letter Audio

- a Start at the top. Go all the way round, up to the top, down and flick.
- b Start at the top. Go straight down, back up, and all the way round.

- c Start at the top, and go round.
- d Start at the middle. Go all the way round, all the way up to the top, straight down, and flick.
- e Start near the bottom. Go up, around, and down.
- f Start at the top. Go round, straight down, and round. Lift your pencil, and cross the 'f' in the middle.
- g Start at the top. Go all the way round, up to the top, straight down, and round.
- h Start at the top. Go straight down, up and over, down, and flick.
- i Start at the top. Go straight down, and flick. Lift your pencil and put a dot at the top.
- j Start at the top. Go straight down, and round. Lift your pencil and put a dot at the top.
- k Start at the top. Go straight down, back up, over and round, down and flick.
- l Start at the top. Go straight down, and flick.
- m Start at the top. Go down, up and over, down, up and over, down, and flick.
- n Start at the top. Go down, up and over, down and flick.
- o Start at the top, and go all the way round.
- p Start at the top. Go straight down, up to the top, and all the way round.
- q Start at the top. Go all the way round, up to the top, straight down, and flick.
- r Start at the top. Go straight down, back up and over, and flick.
- s Start at the top. Go round, down, and back round.
- t Start at the top. Go straight down, and round. Lift your pencil, and cross the 't'.
- u Start at the top. Go down, round, back up to the top, down, and flick.
- v Start at the top. Go down, and back up to the top.
- w Start at the top. Go down, back up to the top, down, and back up to the top.
- x Start at the top. Go down to the bottom. Lift your pencil to the top, and down across the other way.
- y Start at the top. Go down and round, back up to the top, then straight down, and round.
- z Start at the top. Go straight across, diagonally to the bottom, and across.

Upper case letters

- A Down, lift, down, lift and across.
- B Down, lift, and round till you stop, and round till you stop.

C	Round.
D	Down, lift, and round.
E	Down, and across, lift, across at the top, lift, across in the middle.
F	Down, lift, across at the top, lift, across in the middle.
G	Round, up, and down, lift your pencil and cross the middle.
H	Down, lift, down, lift and across in the middle.
I	Down.
J	Down, and round.
K	Down, lift, out from the middle up, lift, out from the middle down.
L	Down, and across.
M	Down, lift, down and across, up and across, and down.
N	Down, lift, down and across, and up.
O	Round.
P	Down, lift, and round till you stop.
Q	All the way round, lift, and down.
R	Down, lift, and round till you stop, out from the middle, and down.
S	Round, and back round.
T	Down, lift, and across.
U	Down, round, and up.
V	Down, and up.
W	Down, up, down, and up.
X	Down and across, lift, down and across.
Y	Down and across, lift, and all the way down and across.
Z	Straight across, down and across, and straight across.

Appendix 2 – Order of teaching

Correct letter formation is reviewed using letter families grouped according to similar handwriting movements.

Set 1

c a o d g q s f e

Set 2

i l t u j y

Set 3

r n m h k b p

Set 4

v w x z

Appendix 3 – Teaching of Joins

To teach the joins we have split the 26 lower case letters into four joining groups (which are not the same as the letter sets/families) according to the nature of the joins they require.

There are four types of join and a set of 'break' letters after which joins are never made.

Group 1

a c d e h i k l m n s t u

Thirteen letters with exit flicks plus s.

Group 2

a c d e g i j m n o p q r s u v w x y

Nineteen letters which start at the top of the x-height.

Group 3

b f h k l t

Six letters which start at the top of the ascender.

Group 4

f o r v w

Five letters which finish at the top of the x-height.

The break letters

b g j p q x y z

Eight letters after which no join is made. Joins are not made to or from the letter z.

The joins

	Group	→	Group	
The first join	1	→	2	<i>in am</i>
The second join	1	→	3	<i>ab ch</i>
The third join	4	→	2	<i>oa wo</i>
The fourth join	4	→	3	<i>wh ob</i>
The break letters				<i>bigger</i>

The joined style

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The first join

The join from any member of joining group 1 to any member of joining group 2 is made with exactly the same movement as a diagonal join from one letter to the start of the next.

in

Teaching the first handwriting join is linked to the letter sets/families:

- When the first diagonal join is introduced, from the bottom of a small letter to the top of the next, we teach the diagonal join to Set 1 letters first, e.g. *ed, eg, ac, as*.
- This is followed by the diagonal join to Set 2 letters e.g. *iu, ig, iy*.
- Then diagonal joins to Set 3 letters e.g. *ar, an, am, ap*.
- Finally the diagonal join to Set 4 letters e.g. *aw, ew, ex, ux*.

The second join

The join from any member of joining group 1 to any member of joining group 3 is the same as the first join except that the join meets the ascender halfway up the letter and then continues to the top of the ascender.

il

Teaching the second handwriting join is linked to letter families too:

- The second join, a diagonal join from the bottom of a small letter to the top of an ascender, is taught using Set 1 letters first, then Set 2, 3 and 4.
- For example to Set 1 letters *if, ef, wf*; to Set 2 letters *il, it*; Set 3 letters *ck, ch*.

The third join

The join from any member of joining group 4 to any member of joining group 2 is a horizontal curve because the join is from the x-height of one letter to the x-height of the next.

og

Teaching the third join, the horizontal join from the top of one letter, across and to the top of the next, is also taught using letter families:

- The third join to Set 1 letters e.g. wa, wo, fo; to Set 3 letters on, om; Set 4 letters ow.

The fourth join

The join from any member of joining group 4 to any member of joining group 3 is the same as the first join except that it goes from the x-height of one letter to the top of the ascender of the next.

ob

The fourth join is the join from the top of a small letter to the top of an ascender.

- To Set 1 letters e.g. of, ff; to set 2 e.g. wl, rl; Set 3 e.g. ob, oh, ok.

Appendix 4 – Handwriting Assessment Tracker

Area of development:	Dates evidence		
	Working towards	Secure	
Early Years			
Can demonstrate large muscle movements			
Can demonstrate small muscle movements			
Demonstrates some pencil control			
Beginning to use correct letter formation when writing			
Beginning to correctly form lower case letters			
Beginning to correctly form capital letters			
Demonstrates correct formation of the digits 0-9			
<i>Is able to write three or more simple statements on a given subject that can be read without the child's help and that make sense, although letter shapes and spelling may not be fully accurate.</i>			
Year 1			
Maintains a good sitting position			
Holds a pencil comfortably and correctly (using a tripod grip if possible)			
Demonstrates they can form lower-case letters starting and finishing in the right correct place and orientation			
Forms capital letters and digits in the correct orientation			
Demonstrates a difference in their ascenders and descenders			
Understands which letters belong to which handwriting 'families'			
Separates words with finger spaces			
<i>Is able to sustain handwriting for a paragraph or more, that can be read without help from the child. Producing letter shapes, which are mainly accurate.</i>			
Year 2			
Forms lower-case and capital letters of the correct size, orientation and relative to one another			
Uses spacing between words that reflects the size of letters			
Starting to use some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes to join letters			
Understands which letters are the break letters and does not join them			
<i>Is able to produce close to a side (or more) of A4 handwriting that is clear and consistent.</i>			

Year 3			
Maintains legible and consistent handwriting, including consistent sizing			
Consistently joins handwriting across the curriculum			
Uses appropriate spacing between words			
<i>Is able to produce close to a side (or more) of A4 handwriting that is clear, consistent and joined.</i>			
Year 4			
All handwriting is joined correctly, independently and fluently across the curriculum			
Uses appropriate spacing between words, as well as between ascenders and descenders			
Is given opportunities to write in pen, before being awarded their pen licence			
<i>Is able to produce more than a side of A4 handwriting that is clear and consistent.</i>			
Year 5 and Year 6			
Joined handwriting is legible and fluent, even when writing at speed			
Chooses the correct writing implement best suited for a particular task			