

# HANDWRITING & PRESENTATION POLICY



***Handwriting – a useful, elegant and  
essential branch of education***

## **A guide to the basics of teaching handwriting to children**

Teaching handwriting is a priority at Billingshurst Primary School. In order to concentrate fully on **what** to write, children need to be able to write without thinking about **how** to write.

By the age of 8, most children have adopted a pencil grip, formed a style and developed habits which are hard to change. It is essential that they have been taught the correct habits by this stage. It is in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 that these should be taught: teachers in this part of the school should regularly check that children are holding a pencil correctly, for example. It is also vital that, as a school, we have the same high expectations of children's handwriting and presentation across the curriculum. Handwriting should be as neat in Science books as it is during 'Relax Think Write' sessions.

### **Joined from the start!**

Joined handwriting should be taught as soon as children have learnt to form their letters correctly. Isolated letters should only be taught *if* and *when* problems arise. This does not mean that children can't practise writing one letter on its own in whilst learning the writing process, but if a child is writing a short word like *cat*, the letters should be joined. CVC words are taught joined in reception.

Traditionally English has been one of the only languages in the world where children are not taught a joined script from the beginning of their time at school. The reason for teaching a joined script is quite logical: if children learn to print, they will subsequently have to relearn how to write for a second time when they are taught to join letters. This confuses them. In addition, many children who print regularly confuse capital letters and small letters in their writing: this is far less likely to happen if they write in a joined script from the start. As a general rule, children who print are poorer spellers than those who join.

### **'I can't read joined up writing.'**

Children may say to their teacher '*I can't read joined up writing.*' Pay little attention to this. If they are taught joined writing from the start, they will learn to read a joined script. Other children who were not taught a cursive script from the start will learn to appreciate a joined script, even if it is a little confusing at the start.

### **Classroom environment**

All notices, displays, titles and signs in the classroom and around the school should be in joined script if they are hand written.

Classrooms should have examples of handwritten signs (not all displays should be in 'typed' font!)

The discrimination between **printed script** (a conventional script used by publishers for books and also for computer generated word-processed documents) and **cursive script** (a conventional written script) should continually be pointed out to children. This is understandably a little confusing to them: *why should I be joining my handwriting, the writing isn't joined in the books I read!* There is a reason for this and children must be taught to understand this.

### **The Teachers Role**

When writing comments in a children's book, always write in a cursive hand that the children can read. Practice what you preach. It is crucially important that they can read your handwriting: if it isn't legible to the child, what kind of message are you giving to him or her?

Don't praise children for neat printing – it encourages children to print, neatly!

The teaching of handwriting is essentially a non-creative activity which involves training, tracing, copying and practising (remind the children: *practise makes perfect!*). It is essential that they watch the teacher demonstrating how to write and subsequently try it for themselves. As handwriting is a movement skill, demonstration by a competent teacher is essential.

Children should then be taught to compare their results very critically with what the teacher has written. Older children can also be taught to constructively criticise each other's efforts (peer assessment). Essentially the approach adopted by teachers to this key skill should be characterised by a rigorous (and even fussiness!).

As a teacher, you cannot possibly get around thirty children and check up on their progress during a handwriting session. Instead chose a small group of children to focus on, look at their efforts and provide feedback to them. This feedback should be very pedantic, picky and even *'overly fussy'*. Assist the children to pay attention to detail. They should be aiming to produce an exact copy of what you have done on the board. Picking out their inaccuracies, whilst of course remaining positive and encouraging, will arrest the development of bad habits. Be very meticulous with children and teach them to be meticulous too.

Children should be taught to write quickly but accurately before leaving primary school. This is a key life skill that will help them in secondary school and beyond. One way of getting them to focus upon both speed and accuracy, whilst also reflecting on how they have improved, is to have a sentence that they practise regularly from the time they start school. This allows a child to compare her attempts with previous efforts and consider if she is

- improving in terms of quality
- speeding up

At BPS we could have a shorter and longer version of the following sentence, the shorter form being used in the early stages of writing, with the longer version being adopted from Year 3 onwards.

**At BPS I am learning to write neatly and quickly.**

**At Billingshurst Primary School I am learning to produce neat, accurate, cursive writing. I am learning to write at speed too.**

### **Fundamental issues which must be taught to children**

- An orthodox pencil grip.
- A pencil must always be sharp before you use it.
- Tiny pencils, less than 8 cm. long should be discarded.
- How to sit on a chair properly (not slouch), sitting up, with a straight back, the chair pushed in a comfortable amount and both legs under the table. The children's thighs should be parallel and their feet flat on the floor.
- All four chair legs must be on the ground – children should not be rocking.
- The fact that the non-writing hand (left for right-handers; right for left-handers) should be on the table in front of the child in a supportive position.
- When writing, books should be fully open, not folded over. Children should be sitting in such a way that their books are not overlapping when they are writing.
- Right-handers can tilt their book to the left. Left-handers can tilt their book to the right. In each case the amount of tilt should be

no more than 45 degrees. Quite simply, children should not be allowed to write at a 90 degree angle.

- To assist a child who has a problem with the amount of 'tilt' a right angled corner of tape can be stuck onto the desk where he sits so that he can see where to put the corner of his book.
- A clutter free table is required with adequate space for a number of children to write with a maximum of two children to a table.
- All small letters start at the top with the exception of d and e (which conveniently happen to be next to each other in the alphabet). These two letters start from the middle.
- Capital letters can start from anywhere: the most economically efficient starting point should be found: for most people this is at the top.

**Above all, avoid the creation of the following four ingrained habits**

- ❖ Faulty pencil grip
- ❖ Poor posture
- ❖ Poor book/paper positioning
- ❖ Incorrect letter formation (e.g. starting letters at the bottom)

**Left-handers**

There is no doubt that it is harder to learn to write left-handed, as during the act of writing you are covering what you are writing. Our writing system favours the right handed child.

Left-handed children should always sit on the left hand side of the desk. This makes writing infinitely easier for them. Children must be taught this and continually reminded of it.

Left-handers tend to write lower down, so they should tilt their page to the right. To stop them tilting too far, masking tape can be used (as described above) to provide an outline for their book position. Left-handers will often kneel at the desk: this is because they need to write lower down. Often a left hander may be too low down. To correct this, either a cushion, a lower table or a higher chair can be used.

Left-handers tend to need a slightly longer stem to write with.

## A few technical terms to teach children

- ❖ The word **cursive** means joined.
- ❖ The correct name for the joining bits between letters is **ligatures**.
- ❖ The technical name for a tail is a **flourish**.
- ❖ The technical word for handwriting is **calligraphy**.
- ❖ **Serifs** should **not** be put on letters: historically they come from the tradition of carving (stone masonry) not calligraphy. The letter **I** should not have the two lines at the top. It should appear as shown in the word processed form above.
- ❖ The letters b, d, h, k, and l are called **ascenders**. The top of the letter should reach very close to the top of the line (it shouldn't touch!). The letter **t is not an ascender**.
- ❖ The letters g, j, p, q and y are called **descenders**. The flourish these letters have goes below the line.
- ❖ **t** is an unusual letter – a three quarters letter, rather than an ascender
- ❖ Capital letters should not be huge. They should be no higher than ascenders.

Other vocabulary children should be taught:

- ❖ clockwise
- ❖ anticlockwise
- ❖ vertical
- ❖ horizontal
- ❖ diagonal
- ❖ parallel
- ❖ consonant
- ❖ vowel
- ❖ joined
- ❖ sloped
- ❖ loop

### **Teaching methodology & time each week**

Research shows that children make most progress when they have short, focused handwriting sessions.

In the Foundation Stage, staff should focus closely upon the formation of correct habits. They should closely observe what children do with a writing implement and teach children the correct conventions to follow.

- In reception short handwriting sessions are needed every day. This is often done with various mediums (sand, water etc).
- In Year 1, three 15 minute handwriting sessions are needed each week.
- In Years 2 to 6, two 15 minute handwriting sessions are needed each week. It may also be useful to create other opportunities for the children if and when appropriate. One specific issue should be concentrated on in each session. Looking at more than one issue is potentially confusing to the children. This is adapted as and when children no longer need direct handwriting teaching.
- Children move through phases of writing in each year group. As the children progress, they may move from writing on blank paper to lines or onto a different sized line.

**\*Children move through the phases of their year group/phase as and when they are ready**

<b>Year/Phase</b>	<b>Writing</b>	<b>Maths</b>
<b>Reception</b>	Children working on blank paper in learning journal.	
<b>Year 1</b>	<i>Phase 1-</i> Writing on blank paper <i>Phase 2-</i> Writing in a blank book <i>Phase 3-</i> Writing in a lined book (15mm lines)	Children work in a blank paged book.
<b>Year 2</b>	All children moving onto writing in a lined book (15mm lines)	<i>Phase 1-</i> Children work in a blank paged book. <i>Phase 2-</i> Children work on 10mm squares
<b>Year 3 &amp; 4</b>	All children moving from writing in a lined book (15mm lines) to smaller lines (8mm)	<i>Phase 1-</i> Children work on 10mm squares <i>Phase 2-</i> Children move onto 7mm square.
<b><i>*In Year 4, children who have mastered a strong, cursive style of writing may write in pen.</i></b>		
<b>Year 5 &amp; 6</b>	All children moved towards writing in pen.	
<b>* Children may be moved through the stages at a quicker pace if necessary and vice versa for children who are progressing at a slower rate. Handwriting books are NOT USED and children practise handwriting in English books.</b>		

At the start of an academic year, in particular, or the start of a new term or half-term, it is quite acceptable for teaching staff to spend more time than this on handwriting in order to obtain 'quick, positive gains' for the children which result in them being motivated to write due to the improvements they have made.

We do not practise handwriting in a separate book (a handwriting book). Handwriting practise work should be done in children's English book. Otherwise, some children will '**do their best writing**' in a special handwriting book, but then fail to translate what has

been learnt when it comes to doing a piece of writing in their regular writing book. A handwriting book may only be used when a child is having difficulty with the size of their letters.

Research suggests that lines do help children (after the age of 5/6), but they should not be too close together until children enter Key Stage 2. There should be no inflexible rules about when a child starts using lines and when (s)he reverts from lines that are broader to ones that are more narrow. It is the teacher's decision when a child is actually ready to make these important transitions. When children are ready to write on lined paper provide them with a book containing lined paper. Similarly as soon as they are ready to revert from lines that are broader (between 11mm to 15mm) to ones that are narrower (8mm), the change should take place.

Handwriting is a **movement and memory** activity, rather than an explicitly visual activity. This can be proved to children by asking them to write their name with their eyes closed – they can do this, although perhaps not quite as neatly as with their eyes open.

Children can be assisted to improve by developing their ability to discriminate between handwriting that is of a high quality and that which is of an inferior quality. One way to assist them to do this is to get them to look at a sentence written in two different ways and appraise the sentences critically. Teachers should help children to see common errors. They should also exaggerate the errors children produce to make these clear to the children. Allowing children to see errors next to a correct version helps develop the skill of discrimination.

Children need to be taught to look carefully if they are to become good at handwriting. They should look at a letter shape for a long time, analyzing it so they are able to get it exactly right. **Children tend to exaggerate the non-essentials**. As teachers we should be very pernickety about what children produce.

The cross stroke of the t and f should be the same height as the other letters.

Children with very mature handwriting should be challenged: all their down strokes should be equidistant, for example. Can children do this with a word like **minimum?**

### **Writing on interactive whiteboards**

There is no doubt that this is harder for teachers than writing on a whiteboard. Like anything else, regular practice is likely to develop fluency and a high quality of presentation by the teacher.

### **Some strongly held convictions**

In general, children who feel good about their handwriting are far more motivated to write. Those who have a negative self-image of themselves as a writer and are resistant to writing usually have poor handwriting that they are unhappy with.

As a general rule, children who have attractive cursive handwriting are better at spelling than children who have untidy handwriting, or those that print.

Underachievement in writing and all other curriculum areas which involve some form of writing is often the result of poor ability in handwriting often combined with poor layout and organisational skills.

**The essential qualities of good handwriting are fluency, neatness and speed.**