

### Handwriting Advice for the Older Child (KS2 and above)

Some children struggle to develop functional handwriting skills despite on-going practise and support. This can result in difficulties accurately recording their learning and demonstrating their potential at school. As a result their academic attainment can suffer as well as their self-esteem and confidence.

The following advice is designed to empower parents and school staff to support children with handwriting difficulties.

#### **Positioning During Handwriting**

A good position at the table will help the child to be stable and be able to concentrate and use their hands most effectively.

- The child's feet should be flat on the floor with hips and knees at about 90°. A foot box may be required to enable the child's feet to be supported.
- The height of the desk should be (5cms) above the bent elbow (when the child is seated correctly on his/her chair).
- The head should be kept central and the child's bottom should be well back in the chair.
- When copying from a whiteboard the child should be facing it directly.
- A slanted work surface can help (e.g. posture pack or wide A4 lever arch folder or angled board available at IKEA).



#### **Unconventional Pencil Grasps**



- Many children adopt unconventional pencil grasps despite attempts by adults to correct this at a younger age.
- The most functional pencil grasp is a tripod (3 finger) grasp as this allows for maximum control and small, refined letters.
- It can often be difficult to correct a child's pencil grasp beyond the age of 6-7 years, as their natural grasp has become habitual and forcing a more conventional grasp can actually hinder their handwriting further.
- Unconventional pencil grasps can be functional and do not always cause the child any difficulties therefore careful consideration needs to be given to why the grasp needs to be changed.
- Rubber pencil grips (Get a Grip Pencil Grip assessment kit available from <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/>) can be useful for younger children who are still working on developing a mature grasp and need help to position their fingers correctly.
- Rubber pencil grips can be trialled at any age and may simply be more comfortable for some children, particularly those children with joint laxity (bendy fingers).
- For older children (10 and above) compensatory strategies need to be considered such as use of chunky pencils and easy flow pens to help reduce handwriting strain, as it is likely to be more difficult to change the nature of their pencil grasp through use of a rubber pencil grip by this age.

### Printing vs Cursive

- This is a topic covered in detail on the National Handwriting Association website (<https://nha-handwriting.org.uk/handwriting/articles/>).
- The most important factor to consider is whether the child is able to produce legible writing which enables them to demonstrate their true potential.

### Pen Licence Scheme

- Some schools adopt a 'pen licence' scheme. This means that children generally have to demonstrate consistent letter formation, letter sizing and spacing, joined up and fluent writing in order to gain permission to use a pen.
- For children that are experiencing difficulties with handwriting, the pen licence scheme can have an impact on their confidence and self-esteem, as they observe their peers progressing around them.
- Most children will find it easier to write with a pen as the shaft is usually thicker (enabling a more secure and less effortful grasp), pen requires less pressure than pencil (so can assist pressure and reduce effort) and the easy flowing nature of rollerball pens (e.g. Uniball or Frixion erasable pens) can aid fluency and help reduce fatigue.

### Handwriting Practice:

- Research has shown that regular practice (at least 3 times a week) of the specific area of difficulty e.g. letter formation is required instead of generic fine motor activities e.g. Finger Gym.
- There are a large number of handwriting programmes that can be purchased by schools:
  - 'Handwriting without Tears' takes a child from pre – writing skills to a mastery of cursive. <https://www.lwtears.com/>. An app version is also available.
  - 'Start Write Stay Write' addresses the environmental, postural and physical elements required for effective and automatic writing. Available from <https://www.tts-group.co.uk/>
  - 'Write from the Start' contains over 400 graded perceptual-motor activities.
  - 'Write Dance' Programme by Ragnhild Oussoren. This is a progressive music and movement programme for the development of pre- writing and writing skills. Suitable for 5-8 years.

### ICT

- Whilst it is important to develop handwriting skills, this should not become a barrier to learning. For children who find writing for longer periods challenging and are unable to present all their ideas in an allotted time frame or in a legible way, computer access may be beneficial to ensure they are able to demonstrate their true potential.
- Refer to 'Using IT to Write' Advice sheet for more details

### Resources:

- <https://www.twinkl.co.uk/resource/t-l-52341-handwriting-activity-sheets>.
- <https://www.education.com/worksheets/handwriting/>.
- <https://www.jellyandbean.co.uk/free-resources/>
- <https://www.sparklebox.co.uk/literacy/writing/ground-grass-sky-handwriting.html>.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/key-stage-2-tests-access-arrangements>
- BBC Dance Mat Typing practise can be accessed for free online