NHS
West Suffolk
NHS Foundation Trust

Integrated Community Paediatric Services
Paediatric Occupational Therapy Service

Using IT to Write

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, or struggle to produce legible writing, a computer laptop or tablet could support them to get their ideas onto paper and is often an option that can be used alongside continued handwriting practice.

Effective integration of technology into the classroom can reduce barriers to achievement, help pupils access the curriculum and complete work at a level that evidences their learning rather than their limitations. In the wider context beyond school, handwriting is often not the main means of recording and therefore it is beneficial to develop efficient typing skills as well.

Top Tips

- Accessibility/Ease of Access features can make using technology easier
  - E.g. adjusting the font size or style, colour adjustment, speech-to-text, narrator, slowing the cursor speed and speed of the mouse clicks.
  - Many are built into the operating system of the computer or mobile device with no need to buy extra software, but features will vary between devices/software versions.
  - The accessibility menu (or Ease of Access) is usually found in the settings menu.
- Alternative keyboards can be provided for children who struggle with standard keyboards
  - E.g. keyboards with larger keys that are easier to see or press, small keyboards which are easier to cover when typing with one hand, high-vis keyboards for children with a visual impairment, lower case keyboards or lower-case keyboard stickers for children who are not familiar with capital letters.

  - These are widely available at relatively low cost e.g. Inclusive Technology/Amazon
- Touch Screen
  - A tablet with a touchscreen may be a useful option for children struggling to control and use a mouse.
  - Using a stylus with a touch screen device may help support development of a dynamic tripod grip needed to handwrite. These are widely available at relatively low cost e.g. Inclusive Technology/Amazon

- Learning to type
  - A short-term trial of typing will not be successful. Lots of typing practise helps create muscle memory so that you can type without having to look at the keyboard and your fingers.
  - Using a Bluetooth keyboard with a touchscreen tablet will help support the development of touch-typing skills, typing speed and muscle memory. Typing on a touchscreen is not the same as typing on a keyboard.
  - More information can be found at Tips for Teaching: Keyboarding (nha-handwriting.org.uk)
  - There are websites and programmes that help children learn to find letters on the keyboard and type e.g.
    - Typing Club (free)
    - BBC Dancemat (free)
    - Ratatype (free)
    - Touch-type Read and Spell
    - Nessy Fingers

- Speech to text/voice recognition is an alternative to typing on a keyboard
  - This is an area where there have been huge improvements in technology, and lots of the options are now freely available.
  - Remember that dictation is not the same as talking in conversation. Dictation is a skill that has to be practised and developed. It might help to begin with lots of short sessions, dictating a passage from a book rather than trying to compose ideas and dictate at the same time.
  - Keep in mind that to use dictation, you have to be able to speak clearly.
  - A headset microphone will provide the greatest levels of accuracy, as there is less space between the users mouth and the microphone which reduces distortion.
  - Speech to text options are feasible for exams or tasks that can be completed at home or in a quiet breakout space in school, but the software does not produce accurate results when used in a busy classroom where there is background noise.
  - Free to use examples include:
    - Notes app on Apple iPad or iPhone
    - Dictate in Windows 10
    - Voice typing within Google Docs
    - SpeechTexter (requires Google Chrome)
- Text to speech reads back what's been typed to help listen for possible mistakes or support children who find it difficult to read.
  - E.g. 'Read Aloud' under the 'Review' tab within Microsoft Word (Windows 10)
- Word prediction predicts what you are trying to type (even if it's misspelled) and lists suggested words.
  - This can help improve the speed and flow of writing, avoiding the child getting stuck waiting for help to spell a word, or forgetting what the rest of the sentence was going to say after struggling to spell a word
  - E.g. Clicker/Penfriend/Text Help- Read & Write
- Word banks can help a child think of topic-related words, or help emerging writers build sentences from whole words e.g. https://www.cricksoft.com/uk/clicker
- Dictionaries and thesauri, some of which allow the child to look up words with sound or pictures or look up words in their first language.
  - E.g. Clicker, Text Help Read & Write
- Digital graphic organizers can help organize thoughts visually prior to writing, by creating an on-screen spider diagram, flow chart or mind map. Some of these will also transfer the contents of the mind map into a word document.
  - E.g. Clicker, Inspiration, Kidspiration
- Specialist software & apps are available to support students to set out and solve maths problems, carry out maths calculations, draw and measure shapes and graphs, create science diagrams.
  - E.g. Splash! City Maths
- A lightweight tablet can be easier for a student to carry around school and set up on the desk independently rather than a laptop
- Parents/school staff should check all sites before they are used by the children, and ensure that suitable filters are in place on all devices.