

St. Monica's Catholic Primary School Handwriting Policy



‘Let Trust, Respect and Love live here.’

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Handwriting Policy

Mission Statement

'With Handwriting, good teaching lasts a lifetime!' (NHA, 2005)

At St Monica's we believe that handwriting is a priority. Children need to be able to write without thinking about **how** to write, this enables them to concentrate on **what** to write. Handwriting is a skill like reading, spelling and mathematics, which must be taught to enable children the opportunity to become automatic writers in order to access all forms of written communication across the curriculum. Our aim is for every child to develop a legible and fluent style of handwriting which can be used at speed.

We understand that handwriting is a movement skill and thus best taught by demonstration, explanation and practice. For this reason we follow a systematic and consistent approach of good teaching, modelling and practise of Handwriting from Nursery to Year Six.

We recognise that for many of our children English is not the only language whose script they are learning to write. Whilst the development and use of fine motor skills are common to all scripts, there may be factors which influence the child's ability to form letters (e.g. scripts which are written from right to left) consequently we show sensitivity in valuing writing forms other than English.

Essential Teaching Points

In order to meet our aims, the following principles are followed in the teaching of handwriting:

1) Cursive script is taught from the very start

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 to this:

- 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.
- By making each letter or word in one movement, children's hands develop a 'physical memory' of it, making it easier to produce the correct shape and therefore supports the learning of spelling.
- Because letters and words flow from left to right, children are less likely to reverse letters which are typically difficult (such as b/d or p/q).
- The continuous flow of writing ultimately improves speed and spelling.
- It is recommended by the British Dyslexia Foundation as the best method of handwriting for children with Dyslexia.

2) A tripod pencil grasp is nurtured

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 Early Years 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. Pencil grips are provided as soon as possible to support the development of a tripod pencil grasp. We use the term “pinch and flick” with the children to encourage them to pick up the pencil and hold it in the correct position.

3) Good posture and position of paper is modelled and encouraged by all staff

The following rules are taught to children, monitored and encouraged by ALL members of staff:

- 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 child’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 non-writing hand (left for right handers; right for left handers) should be on the paper in front of the child in a supportive position.
- 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.

4) The teaching of handwriting is progressive

We follow ‘The seven stages of handwriting’:

1. **Pre-writing Experience**
2. **Pencil grip and Posture**
3. **Lower Case Cursive Letter formation**
4. **Joining**
5. **Upper Case Letter Formation**
6. **Letter positioning and spacing**
7. **Fluency and Speed**

5) Handwriting is taught regularly and well modelled to the children-

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 pupils 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. As a result, all staff follow these guidelines when teaching and fostering the development of handwriting:

- All staff use the adopted cursive style to model accurate formation to the children.
- All staff are consistent in their use of language (e.g. ditties, mantras) when teaching and modelling handwriting
- Handwriting is practised daily throughout the school (in Nursery this will be in the form of fine motor development)
- Teachers, Teaching Assistants and HLTAs are a part of daily handwriting sessions

6) We ALL have high expectations for handwriting

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, analysing it so they are able to get it exactly right. Children tend to exaggerate the non-essentials. **As teachers we should be very picky about what children produce.**

During Handwriting sessions, children should be taught to compare their results very critically with what the teacher has modelled. 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 rigor.

Teachers will focus on a small group of children and delegate another group for the TA/HLTA linked to your class. When reviewing handwriting, look at the child's 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 has been modelled on the board. Picking out their inaccuracies, whilst of course remaining positive and encouraging, will prevent the development of bad habits. **Be very meticulous with children and teach them to be meticulous too.**

A reward system is in place to encourage children to raise standards in handwriting. A weekly handwriting cup is offered as a reward for improving hand writers and 'Writer of the month' has been implemented across the school to acknowledge pupils with high standards of writing.

7) Resources are accessible and used to support the teaching and learning of handwriting:

- ✓ In Nursery, teachers use the Dough Gym scheme of work to provide children with pre-writing experience and learn the basic skills of handwriting. They dance and take part in many fun gross motor and fine manipulative skills within this scheme. In addition to this, daily fine motor activities are available for all children to access and those more in need of developing their fine motor skills are directed to these activities.
- ✓ All teachers have copies of formation letter ditties and templates to model cursive script.
- ✓ Good quality writing instruments are provided. In the EYFS children are encouraged to use triangular shaped pencils to encourage the development of the tripod pencil grasp, yet are encourage to transfer to standard writing pencils as soon as they are able. Children are taught and follow the rule that a pencil must be sharp before use and must be longer than 8cm. In Year Three, handwriting pens are introduced.
- ✓ Writing instruments are varied in children's free time, such as writing areas and in some literacy sessions to provide opportunities for children to practise and experiment with different writing tools.
- ✓ Claw pencil grips are provided as soon as children are displaying an inefficient pencil grip.
- ✓ Lower case cursive letter formation strips are provided on tables for children to refer to when writing.
- ✓ Handwriting books are provided **without tram lines**, as to not confuse the children. Research suggests that lines do help children, but they should not be too close together until children enter Key Stage 2. Children are taught to write on lined paper. As soon as they are ready to revert from lines that are broader (between 11mm to 14 mm) to ones that are narrower (8 mm), the change should take place.
- ✓ Handwriting books with tram lines are only used for intervention when a child is finding it difficult to differentiate between ascenders and descenders.
- ✓ Computer software that prints in cursive style is available to all staff to make resources to support the teaching and modelling of handwriting.

8) The environment is supportive to handwriting

A clutter free table is required with adequate space for a number of children to write. All notices, displays, titles and signs in the classroom and around the school should be in joined script if they are hand written. We have purchased computer software that prints in a cursive style. More examples of cursive script around the school environment – including word joined word processing - will assist pupils to appreciate this writing convention.

9) Differentiation is used to support those with differing needs, difficulty or to challenge others that may be ready for new skills

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. Teachers are aware of any left-handed children in their class and ensure that teaching and learning is modified for those children to ensure they are not disadvantaged in any way when writing. The following guidelines are adhered to:

- 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 to provide an outline for their book position. A mat can always be provided to support children with this.
- 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.
- Letter formation is modelled specifically for left-handed children, as well as right-handed children.
- Left handed children should always sit on the left hand side of the desk. This makes writing infinitely easier for them. They must sit on the left of right-handed children, otherwise their arms will clash.
- Sometimes a mark is made at the left side of the page to indicate where writing begins.
- The pencil/pen should sit in the 'v' between the thumb and forefinger (tripod grasp) and the wrist should be straight when writing.
- To avoid smudging their work children are encouraged to position their fingers about 1.5cm away from the end of their writing instrument.

Children with Special Educational Needs

We recognise that all children are unique and will acquire the skill of handwriting in different ways. Some children develop handwriting skills with relative ease, while others struggle and need further support. As a result:

- Teachers use the Seven Stages of Handwriting as an assessment and identification tool to recognise pupils who are having difficulty with handwriting.
- Handwriting lessons are differentiated to support the needs of all children in the class and target groups are generated to provide additional support for children who are not responding to teaching targets.
- Handwriting targets are often documented and reviewed on SEN Support Plans and used as a working document to support individual children's learning.
- Parents are informed of any concerns teachers have with regard to the handwriting development of their child.
- Extra resources are available for teaching assistants to conduct small handwriting groups or one to one sessions to focus on specific handwriting targets. Some children may need to use pencil grips or special writing instruments, these can be provided as and when teachers identify difficulties. Other pieces of equipment, such as: special seating, sloping boards, special paper, will be purchased if needed.
- We appreciate the role of outside professionals in relation to meeting the needs of the pupils within our school. Therefore in our work with SEN children we will contact, communicate and liaise with external agencies in supporting the learning of SEN pupils.

More Able Pupils

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

Children can be assisted to become more reflective about handwriting and different handwriting styles. They will further develop 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. These pupils are also invited to use handwriting for a range of purposes and discuss expectations for different pieces of writing e.g. note-taking/formal letter.

10) Regular assessment of handwriting supports progression

The assessment of handwriting is important to ascertain whether pupils are ready to move on to the next stage in learning.

Informal assessment of handwriting is carried out by the class teacher in their marking of written tasks, scaffolding of children's learning during writing sessions and weekly teaching and marking of handwriting lessons. Extended Writing is a fantastic tool in monitoring the progress of handwriting and setting specific handwriting targets.

Formal assessment is conducted at the start of every term. The Seven Stages of Handwriting document informs teachers of how to assess the achievement of each handwriting stage to see if the child is ready to move on.

At the end of KS1 and throughout KS2, teachers also have SATs assessments which will enable them to review each child's handwriting ability in relation to national standards.

Assessment of handwriting is used to give children immediate, specific and positive feedback. It is also used to ascertain differentiated teaching groups e.g. joiners and letter formers and also for generating target groups for children that need extra support.

Assessment and targets are shared with parents at parent consultations and in reports.

11) Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is of great importance in the development of handwriting. The methods of teaching handwriting need to be consistent at school and at home to ensure children do not develop any bad habits or learn incorrect formation of letters or pencil hold.

St Monica's aim to include parents in the teaching and learning of handwriting by sending home informative letters at the start of each school year to inform parents about how they can help with handwriting at home. Workshops are also used to model cursive font and support parents to understand The Seven Stages of Handwriting.

Class teachers use parents as another tool in the teaching and learning of handwriting. Handwriting is sometimes sent home as homework with clear instructions of how children should be forming letters/completing basic joins. Parents are also informed if teachers have any concerns about a child's handwriting and are given advice and additional resources for how they can help support their child at home.

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