

Wales Primary School

Handwriting Agreement

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THE JOURNEY TO LONG TERM SUCCESS

What happens after our training is crucial to achieving excellent presentation skills across the curriculum. We have to realise and accept that *improvement does require change*. This is true in any walk of life. Whether you are an individual member of a team or if we talk about the team as a whole, improvement does require change and a willingness to accept change. It is pointless to continue doing what you have always done and hoping to do it a little bit better. The same applies to teaching materials. To continue using a type of exercise book which gives children no support or guidance with handwriting, just because you have always used these exercise books, is not a good reason for continuing to use them. *Improvement requires change*.

NEXT STEPS

Consistency is a key word.

Consistency in terms of the handwriting style and letter shapes being taught

Consistency in terms of how handwriting lessons are taught

Consistency in terms of the way teaching materials and writing tools are used

Consistency in terms of the teaching language which is used

Consistency in terms of all members of staff supporting and believing in this drive for excellence in handwriting. It has to be seen that this is what **we** are doing as a staff. It has to be seen that this is something that is happening in every class. It has to be seen that this is something **we** all believe in. The more that teachers give strong messages to pupils, showing they are really passionate about high quality presentation of work, the greater the likelihood of high standards being achieved.

FREQUENCY OF HANDWRITING LESSONS

For a school aiming to drive up standards of presentation, handwriting has to be taught intensively for a sustained period, if the initiative is to have the required impact.

'Do a little and do it often' is a key phrase. *Doing a little* means lessons of 15/20 minutes. *Doing it often* means doing at least four handwriting lessons per week, using the programme of lessons we provide.

If this level of intensity is maintained for the equivalent of half a term, ie. 6 or 7 weeks, a dramatic rise in standards will be seen very rapidly, not just in handwriting lessons, but in the way children present their work across the curriculum.

What happens then?

The school would carry out a review of how the initiative has progressed so far, with a scrutiny of writing samples from various year groups. At this point the classes would be able to reduce the frequency of lessons; perhaps one lesson per fortnight in upper KS2 and one lesson per week in lower KS2, but with a big emphasis on applying skills from handwriting lessons in writing tasks of varying length, across the curriculum.

In Y1 and Y2, lessons could be reduced to two per week. In Foundation stage, activities are taking place every day to develop gross motor skills, finger strength, fine motor skills and pencil control.

When children return from the longer holidays there needs to be a 'topping up' in order to re-establish good habits and good attitudes which are required for excellent handwriting. After a summer holiday, it is important that strong foundations are laid for the year ahead. Following a staff session led by a SLT member in which reasons why the school really values good presentation of work are stated, every class should do a handwriting lesson every day for the first three weeks in order to set the standards which are to be maintained throughout the year. Year one classes will need to continue teaching handwriting intensively during the first half of the autumn term. Other classes will be able to scale back on lesson frequency.

After Christmas and Easter holidays, there should be a week where handwriting is taught daily in each class, in order to re-establish high standards.

Within the framework above, there should be a degree of flexibility. A teacher who recognises that handwriting standards have slipped in their own class, should have the freedom use their own professional judgement, perhaps after consultation with SLT, to re-establish high standards by having a week of daily handwriting lessons.

NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

At the beginning of an academic year, most schools will have a number of new teachers or TAs. This can also happen during the school year. Newcomers need a comprehensive, thorough period of induction to the teaching of handwriting. This

should consist of the following:

1. Observing colleagues teach handwriting lessons, followed by paired discussion on teaching strategies modelled and how the lesson was structured.
2. Team teaching with more experienced colleagues.
3. Meeting with SLT members, focusing on the principles behind the whole school ethos of good presentation of work.
4. The new member of staff being provided with the *Excellence In Handwriting* booklet and all teaching materials, with clear explanation of how to use them.

THREE LEVELS OF PRESENTATION FOR CHILDREN

There are occasions when writing tasks or handwritten recording of work in different curriculum areas should be presented beautifully and times where presentation is less important. This is best explained by the three levels of presentation shown below.

1. **Highest level of presentation.** For example, where the teacher says to the class, *"With the Science investigation we have just finished, we are going to write it up beautifully with written explanations in your finest handwriting, with well constructed tables of results and carefully drawn diagrams. We are going to use plain paper of various sizes and line guides. I want you to feel really proud of your completed work and I want you to make your teacher very proud. I have a big, empty display board waiting for your work."*
2. **Lowest level of presentation.**
eg. Children are working in small groups with large sheets of sugar paper and marker pens. Teacher says, *"You have two minutes to write a superb sentence about the way the bare tree across the playground is moving in the January breeze."* Children are writing at speed, inserting extra words to improve their sentence and perhaps crossing out. Presentation does not matter at all in this type of task.
3. **Middle level of presentation.** This is where children work in exercise books.
eg. Skills work in a literacy lesson; exercises on prefixes, suffixes, comprehension work, how to write extended sentences. There should be clear evidence of the school's handwriting style, with finger spaces and correct joins where they have been taught.
With this type of task, the high quality of the top level of presentation should not be expected or demanded, but the lowest level of presentation would be totally unacceptable.

ADULT HANDWRITING

As with the three levels of presentation for children, there are times when adults in school must produce their finest handwriting and times when good handwriting matters less.

Top level of handwriting. During handwriting lessons or when producing handwritten labels to go with displays of children's work.

Middle level of handwriting. Handwritten comments in children's exercise books. These should be neatly written, using the school's handwriting style. If they are written untidily, they can be inaccessible to the children, making the written comment worthless. Badly written comments give children mixed and contradictory messages. Due to the time required to write perhaps thirty handwritten comments, it is unrealistic for these to be written to the **top level** standards. The same principles as the middle level of presentation for children's writing should apply here.

Bottom level of handwriting. This is where the quality of adult handwriting does not matter at all. eg. *A guided writing activity.* If a class or group of children are offering adjectives and adverbs in rapid succession to enhance a sentence, it would be counter productive for the adult to write slowly and meticulously in their most beautiful handwriting. Guided writing should be short, sharp and pacey. In this bottom level of handwriting, with crossings out, insertion of extra words and arrows to move sections of language within the sentence, the only criteria should be that the children are able to read what the adult has written.

TRANSFERING SKILLS FROM HANDWRITING LESSONS TO OTHER WRITING TASKS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Schools do not pursue an initiative to achieve excellence in handwriting just so that it looks great in handwriting lessons; this would be teaching skills for the sake of teaching skills and totally worthless. The whole idea is for children to use the handwriting skills they have been taught in order to present work across the curriculum in an attractive way that develops feelings of personal pride.

How to achieve this. The three key words are: *insist motivate expect*

Insist on correct posture and correct sitting position throughout the school day
Insist on correct letter formation and correct letter joins in cross curricular writing
Insist on children producing their very best whenever it is required

Motivate children by giving copious amounts of praise when it is merited
Motivate children by *telling* them exactly what you are looking for.

Motivate children by *showing* them exactly what you are looking for
Motivate children by celebrating their efforts and achievements with displays of their written work, showing it is really valued.

Make it clear to children that what you *expect* from them is their very best at all times.

Make it clear to children that nothing less than their own best is acceptable.

Use the same lines for writing tasks as the ones used in handwriting lessons. This plays an enormous part in helping children to transfer handwriting skills to written work across the curriculum.

CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

- Ensure that all children have good viewing of teacher modelling during handwriting lessons. Children must be either facing the board or sideways on to it. No children should have their backs to the board. *In a good Primary classroom, seating arrangements will be organised according to the nature of the task children are engaged in. School furniture is not set in concrete.*
- Children need to have enough desk space when they are writing. Ensure that desks are uncluttered.
- Take left-handed children into consideration. Where children are sitting in pairs, the left- hander should be sitting to the left. *This ensures that both left and right handed children have sufficient space to work comfortably.*
- Ensure that there is sufficient natural light in the classroom . Open the blinds. *They should only be closed if sunlight is shining directly into children's eyes.*
- Ensure that children's writing is clearly visible in the classroom.

CELEBRATE CELEBRATE CELEBRATE

DISPLAY DISPLAY DISPLAY

Short term displays of children's handwriting practice, which can be rotated every

few days, act as a reward, motivation and examples of quality.

Displaying children's written work shows that writing is high priority and really valued by the teacher.

REMEMBER, children learn best and reach their potential when:

Their learning base reflects effort and achievement

Their learning base reflects the teacher's values

Their learning base reflects what is high priority in the school

HANDWRITING TOOLS

In order to produce excellent handwriting, children must have good quality tools.

HB Pencils

- Pencils must always be sharp. *A pencil is not a pencil unless it has a point.*
- Pencils must never be sharpened at both ends. *This is dangerous and also shows complete disrespect for the writing tool.*
- Pencils must not be too small for the child's hand.
- Pencils do not go in children's mouths!

It is good to give children responsibility for keeping their pencils sharp, but adults need to monitor this.

Pens

There is a wide range of pens on the market. These vary from very good to really poor and this quality difference is not always down to cost. The choice of pens is crucial, because children need pens which are conducive to achieving excellence in handwriting.

- Seek advice on recommended pens.
- Give children the opportunity to use pen, first of all in handwriting lessons, when they have shown consistently that they are able to write really neatly in pencil. *Do not be in too big a rush to do this.*
- Where pens are used, give children their own pen with their name on it, rather than have the pens in a communal pot in the middle of the table. *The pens will be better looked after this way. Also, all pens do wear according to the handler.*
- Use pens only for writing tasks where good presentation is required.

The pen has to be seen as a very special tool. The pen has to be seen by pupils as the most important tool they will use in school. The pen has to be seen as very precious. *If the child looks after the pen, the pen will look after the child!* Positive attitudes to the pen will only come if adults constantly reinforce these positive messages.

Please note – Ball point pens / biro's are **not** conducive to the development of good handwriting. If excellence in handwriting is what a school aspires to, good quality writing tools are essential.

ESSENTIAL HABITS FOR DEVELOPING EXCELLENT HANDWRITING

1. **Two hands.** Insist on children always using two hands when writing. *One hand to hold the paper and one hand to write with.*
2. **Six feet.** Children must always keep six feet on the floor. *Their own two feet and the chair's four feet.* This means that the child does not kneel or sit cross legged on the chair. Neither do they rock backwards or forwards on the chair.
3. **BBC.** Ensure that children always sit in the BBC position – *Bottom Back in Chair.* This means that they never sit with the chair sticking out and their bottom on the front edge of the chair.
4. **TNT.** *Tummy Near Table.* This ensures that the child is sitting with their body close to their work, instead of having to stretch forward to write.
5. **Paper position.** *The paper should be upright when the child is writing or at an angle not greater than 45 degrees.* When children turn their paper to an angle greater than this, it is often because the pencil is being held with the thumb in a position which blocks the child's view of the pencil point.

Good posture and correct seating position are vital components of developing good handwriting. The habits above must *not* be seen just as *good habits for handwriting*. They must be insisted upon in all subject areas, throughout the school day, otherwise their impact is reduced. It has to be seen as the correct way, indeed the only way, rather than what is expected merely in handwriting lessons.

DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF PRIDE IN HOW WORK IS PRESENTED

Adults across the school constantly and consistently giving powerful, motivational messages - *'Not a mark on this page apart from straight lines and letters. No creases or curled up corners. No finger marks or ugly crossing out. Be proud of how your work looks. Make me proud of how your work looks.'*

*Rubbers are not part of handwriting equipment. Foster the mindset of, 'When you make a mistake in handwriting lessons, look at the mistake, learn from the mistake, leave it and carry on'.