



St Mary's C of E (VA) Primary School

Working together
in an inclusive Christian environment
to allow every pupil to shine brighter and brighter.

St Mary's is an inclusive school where we believe that all people are of equal value, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, ability or sexual identity. We recognise and respect differences.

Handwriting Policy

This policy is GDPR compliant.

Date of issue: April 2026

Last reviewed/adopted: May 2026 (Academic Standards and Ethos Committee)

Next review date: Summer 2028

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Overview

At St Mary's, handwriting is recognised as a key part of the English curriculum. Writing is taught through two main areas: transcription (spelling and handwriting) and composition (developing and organising ideas).

Pupils need strong transcription skills to write fluently, making handwriting an essential tool in the writing process. Teaching follows the National Curriculum, which sets out the required handwriting outcomes for each year group, supported by additional guidance.

In EYFS, handwriting is supported through both the Physical Development (fine motor skills) and Literacy areas of the curriculum. Children are encouraged to develop early writing skills alongside a love of reading and language. By the end of EYFS, pupils are expected to hold a pencil correctly, form recognisable letters, and write simple words and sentences that can be read by others. (See appendix 1 below of the Statutory Requirements of Key Stage 1 and 2)

We believe that the definition of good handwriting is something fast, legible and joined. It is evident that there is a logical and pedagogic connection between the processes of reading and handwriting. Therefore we aim to teach children from an early age what the specific and pure shapes of letters look like, to enable them to make the connection between the print they read and the letters they write.

Aims

- To develop children's ability to write legibly and clearly
- To enable children to write with fluency and speed
- To encourage children to write using a consistent and appropriate size of writing
- To allow children to develop their own style
- To encourage children to use a comfortable and efficient pencil grip
- To encourage a useful posture and angle for their paper

Teaching and Learning

At St Mary's we use the Penpals Handwriting scheme from Year 1 upwards. (Children in Reception and Year 1 also use Read Write Inc. which is tied to their phonic progression.) Penpals is a programme which offers progression and teaches children to develop fast, fluent and legible handwriting. Penpals has identified five stages that form the basic organisational structure of the scheme:

- Physical preparation for handwriting: gross and fine motor skills leading to mark making, patterns and letter formation (*Foundation Stage, 3-5 years*)
- Securing correct letter formation (*Key Stage 1, 5-6 years*)
- Beginning to join along with a focus on relative size and spacing (*Key Stage 1, 6-7 years*)
- Securing the joins along with a focus on break letters, legibility, consistency and quality (*Lower Key Stage 2, 7-9 years*)
- Practising speed, fluency and developing a personalised style for different purposes (*Upper Key Stage 2, 9-11 years*)

Penpals offers a practical, active learning approach to support the delivery of handwriting teaching. The scheme focuses on whole-class teaching from an interactive whiteboard, with key teaching points clearly identified. As well as this Penpals is attractive and well designed with clear links between all of the elements in each year group.

Timetabling

Handwriting must be taught both discretely and through ongoing reinforcement of skills in everyday written language activities. It is taught 10 minutes daily in Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and 15-20 minute sessions at least twice a week in Key Stage 2.

We teach the following letter families in the order as stated below.

Letter families

For teaching letter formation

Letter family 1

Down and off in another direction

l i t j u y

Letter family 2

Down and retrace upwards

m n r b p h k

Letter family 3

Anticlockwise round

c a d o q g e f s

Letter family 4

Zig-zag letters

v w x z

Simple modern

Individual letters are taught with exit flicks where appropriate:

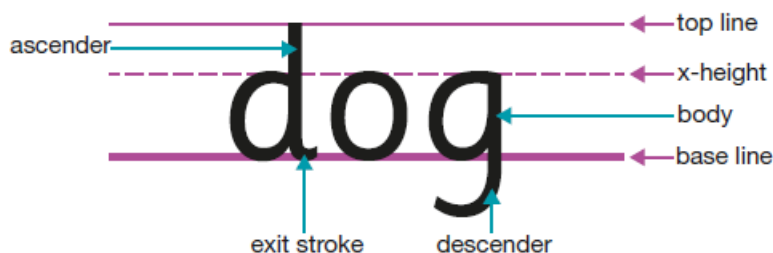
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z

Then, only when letter formation and positioning are both secure, joining is taught. In line with the National Handwriting Association guidance, the break letters, b, g, o, p, s and y are formed with no exit flick.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Terminology:

This is the terminology we use with our Key Stage 2 children. Key Stage 1 may use the words 'tall and tail' for ascenders and descenders and 'short' for x-height.



Diagonal strokes join from letters which finish on the baseline. Horizontal strokes join from letters which finish at the top. Break letters are those which, when adjacent to each other, are best left unjoined.



The three basic rules for joining

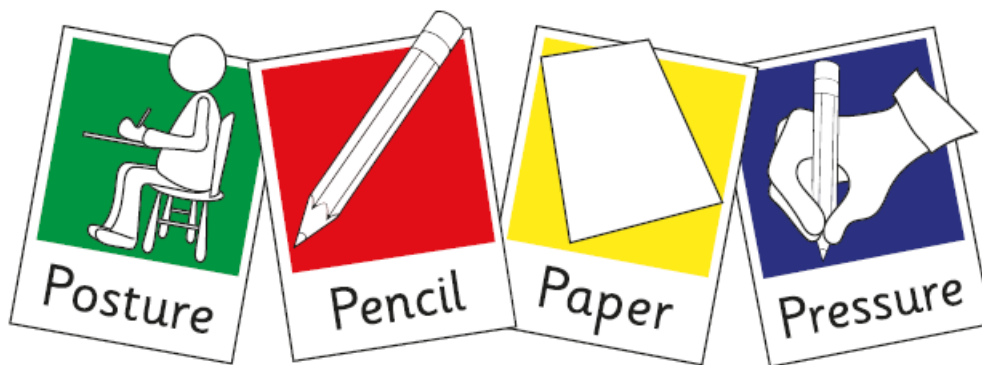
Handwriting as a movement or motor skill:

We recognise that children need to be physically and developmentally ready before they begin to write. This includes both gross and fine motor areas:

- Gross motor factors: core strength, control and postural stability
- Motor planning skills
- Development of a consistent hand preference
- Fine motor factors: good wrist and hand function, finger dexterity
- Development of a pincer grip
- A functional grip on the pencil

The NHS recommends that pre-school age children should have at least 180 minutes of outdoor and physical activity every day in order to reach a good level of physical development. If children are not physically and developmentally ready to write, they should be given further opportunities to develop these skills, whichever year group they are in.

When they are ready, at St Mary's, we use the 4Ps check.



Posture

The children need to maintain a stable, comfortable position to support the process of handwriting.

- Back supported by the chair
- Slight tilt forwards
- Hips, knees and ankles at right angles
- Feet flat on the floor (or supported on a step)

Pencil (grip/grasp)

A functional grip balances control, comfort, and freedom to produce legible writing for a suitable duration. The dynamic tripod grasp is ideal due to its efficient movement, supported by a stable wrist below the writing line. However, other grips can also achieve similar legibility and speed. If a grip is comfortable and functional, it **does not need to be changed**.

Children need to be developmentally ready before they are expected to use a pencil.

- The curriculum includes activities to develop fine motor strength and coordination.
- There is choice of pencils and pens at each stage of development.
- Dynamic pencil grips are explained and modelled.
- Pencils should be held about 2 centimetres from the tip.
- Grip should be supported by a stable wrist, resting on the desk.

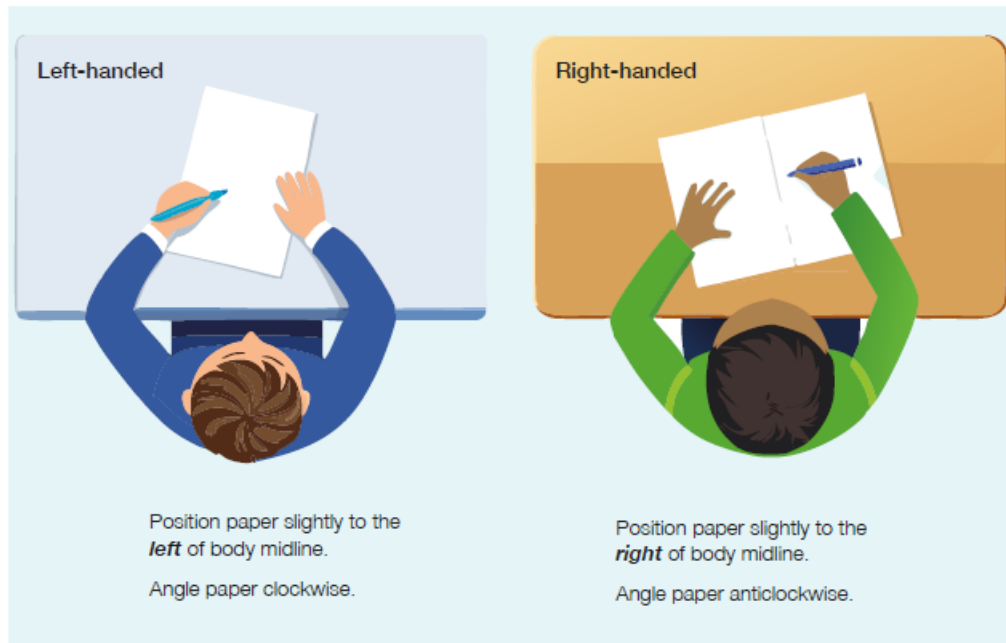
When to intervene

As a child grows older, it becomes increasingly difficult to change a grip. When considering whether action needs to be taken, a general rule should be applied: if the grasp is causing pain, discomfort or fatigue, or is seriously affecting legibility, then seek advice. If not, it should be left

alone. It may be possible to support a more effective grip with a wider choice of pencils and pens, adaptations to posture and relaxation techniques. Where there are doubts, staff will seek advice from an occupational therapist.

Paper

The position of the paper significantly impacts a child's posture and handwriting. The paper should be slanted parallel to the writing arm, slightly offset.



Pressure:

Pressure refers to the force applied through the pen or pencil, ideally leaving a clear, rhythmic trace on paper without being too faint or too heavy. Children often learn appropriate pressure through experimentation, but difficulties in regulating pressure can affect handwriting quality, resulting in faint or overly heavy writing. To support this, we will:

- Warm-up and hand relaxation exercises from the PenPals scheme.
- Observing whole-body factors affecting pressure.
- Providing a variety of writing tools and adaptive equipment.

Key resources:

Pencils and pens

Children will be provided with a variety of pencils and helped to find those that provide control and comfort for them as individuals.

These may include:

- Pencil shapes: triangular and hexagonal bodies
- Tactile qualities: both textured and smooth bodies
- Sizes: variety of widths, lengths and weights
- Lead grading: both hard and soft leads
- Designs: ergonomically designed mechanical pencils for both left and right handers

From Reception, we provide the children with a choice of utensils and guide them where appropriate. If issues arise with individual children we will explore other types of pens or pencils to best suit their needs. For example, gel pens with fast-drying ink are ideal for left-handed writers.

Exercise books

I. Beginner writers: blank paper to focus on the formation of letters

II. Secure formation: a single baseline for letters to sit upon

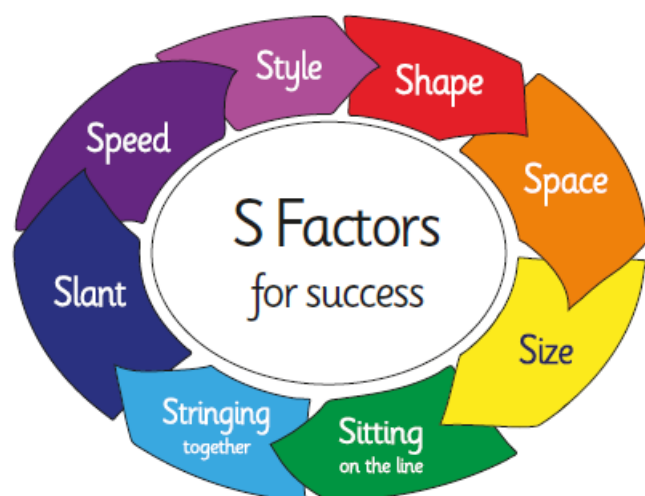
III. Writing more: faint lines with sufficient space for ascenders and capital letters

IV. Understanding alignment: Double lines for a short period to support understanding

V. Developing fluency: Back to normal lines with adequate spacing. It is especially important that developing writers in EYFS and key stage 1 have widely spaced lines so that writing is not cramped. Adequate spacing should continue into key stage 2 as highlighted in the national curriculum requirements for Years 3 and 4. The progression should be gradual and suited to when the child is ready.

The S Factors for Success:

The PenPals scheme follows the S factors for success:



S for Shape: letter formation

We recognise that a key component of legibility is accurate letter formation. It is vital that children are taught how to form the letters of the alphabet correctly from the beginning. At St Mary's, we use the RWI rhymes to secure the correct letter formation in Reception and Year 1.

l t i u y j	1 4
r n m p h b k	2 3 5
c o a d g q s e f	6 8 9 0
z v w x	7

Letter formation families with numbers

Space

S for Space: between letters and words

There needs to be a small space between letters in a word. There needs to be appropriate spaces between words for the sake of legibility. The spaces should be even, match the size of the writing and be about the same size as one letter o or two – oo.

Size

S for Size: the relative positioning of letters

Sitting on the line

S for Sitting on the line

Once children are secure in forming letters correctly, they will be taught where to position them. Sitting the letters on the writing line helps legibility. After sitting, the next step is to understand the relative sizing of letters. x-height/short, ascenders/tall and descenders/tail.



Stringing together

S for Stringing (joining)

Although joining starts in the PenPals scheme at Year 2, only children who are forming their letters correctly will do so.

Slant

S for Slant

A consistent slant helps the appearance of handwriting. A slightly forward slant is a natural movement for right-handers and helps to improve fluency and speed. This step is included in the national curriculum for Years 3 and 4. Slant is practised through writing small words using letters l, h, b, i, u, y: hill, little, etc., with a focus on parallel down strokes.

Speed

S for Speed

Speed and Style are the aspects of handwriting which are secured in Years 5 and 6. Speed is a measure of automation, so it will not develop until the other S factors are embedded. More speed can improve rhythm and fluency but too much can cause illegibility. We know that competent writers have two kinds of handwriting – one which is good quality and is used for more formal

purposes, and the other, a fast, note-taking 'rough' hand which is used when speed is needed. Building up speed takes short regular practice of appropriate tasks: repeating words, phrases, then sentences and paragraphs.

Style **S for Style**

As handwriting develops, the children are encouraged to develop a style of writing that works for them individually and is accessible to a reader. Slight changes to style could also increase fluency and speed.

Left handers

We recognise that left-handers may need further support. Where appropriate, teachers will try:

- A higher seat
- A sloped writing surface
- Good lighting – make sure the writing hand does not cast a shadow on the writing
- Sit on the left-hand side of right-handed writers so elbows do not bump
- Paper tilted clockwise in the left-handed writer position
- Pencils and pens to suit – ergonomic good grip, soft lead, fast drying ink
- Left-handed scissors
- Investigate arm, hand and pen hold positions to find those that suit
- Explore changes to letter formation and joining movements

Technology

At St Mary's, we understand the importance of preparing children to be "hybrid writers" who can use both handwriting and technology effectively, choosing the best mode for each task.

Tools like painting apps and keyboards can support handwriting and typing skills, but typing and organizational techniques will also be taught for effective keyboard use.

For some children, the integration of handwriting and technology, such as using tablets for note-taking and revision, may enhance study skills and provide complementary benefits.

Both are valuable communication tools but handwriting remains an important part of our curriculum.

Inclusion

- We aim to ensure all children make progress in handwriting according to their individual abilities and we look for ways to provide for all needs.
- All children are given the opportunity to develop and practise their skills. Some children may need special support and are taught in small intervention groups and this may include using electronic devices.
- Advice is taken from outside agencies for children with specific learning difficulties.

Appendix 1:

	Statutory requirements	Non-statutory notes and guidance
Year 1 Age 5–6	Pupils should be taught to: • sit correctly at a table, holding a pencil comfortably and correctly • begin to form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place • form capital letters • form digits 0–9 • understand which letters belong to which handwriting ‘families’ (i.e. letters that are formed in similar ways) and to practise these.	Handwriting requires frequent and discrete, direct teaching. Pupils should be able to form letters correctly and confidently. The size of the writing implement (pencil, pen) should not be too large for a young pupil’s hand. Whatever is being used should allow the pupil to hold it easily and correctly so that bad habits are avoided. Left-handed pupils should receive specific teaching to meet their needs.
Year 2 Age 6–7	Pupils should be taught to: • form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another • start using some of the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined • write capital letters and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to one another and to lower-case letters • use spacing between words that reflects the size of the letters.	Pupils should revise and practise correct letter formation frequently. They should be taught to write with a joined style as soon as they can form letters securely with the correct orientation.
Years 3 and 4 Age 7–9	Pupils should be taught to: • use the diagonal and horizontal strokes that are needed to join letters and understand which letters, when adjacent to one another, are best left unjoined • increase the legibility, consistency and quality of their handwriting, for example, by ensuring that the downstrokes of letters are parallel and equidistant; that lines of writing are spaced sufficiently so that the ascenders and descenders of letters do not touch.	Pupils should be using joined handwriting throughout their independent writing. Handwriting should continue to be taught, with the aim of increasing the fluency with which pupils are able to write down what they want to say. This, in turn, will support their composition and spelling.
Years 5 & 6 Age 10–11	Pupils should be taught to write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed by: • choosing which shape of a letter to use when given choices and deciding whether or not to join specific letters • choosing the writing implement that is best suited for a task.	Pupils should continue to practise handwriting and be encouraged to increase the speed of it, so that problems with forming letters do not get in the way of their writing down what they want to say. They should be clear about what standard of handwriting is appropriate for a particular task – for example, quick notes or a final handwritten version. They should also be taught to use an unjoined style, for example, for labelling a diagram or data, writing an email address, or for algebra and capital letters (for example, for filling in a form).