

## PART 1

# Planning handwriting across the whole school

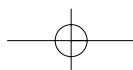
This book provides a practical and innovative approach to the teaching of handwriting. Its key is the belief that the attitudes and methods of teachers are the vital ingredients in children's handwriting success – far more important than the choice of any particular handwriting model. It is particularly crucial that all the teachers in a school are in agreement about the teaching approach.

With this in mind, the first part of the book provides a flexible planning 'kit' to help you and your school develop and implement your own coherent policy. These suggestions can be used alongside any particular handwriting system already in use, but will provide a coherent action plan for those who have not yet started to formulate a systematic policy for themselves.

## 1 The priority for handwriting in the curriculum

What is learned about handwriting in the early days at school will affect children for many years to come. Providing enough priority is given to skill training, and handwriting is taught systematically but imaginatively from the start of formal teaching, most children should learn quite easily. As there has been so little guidance on how to teach handwriting for so long, it has now become accepted that it is a problem to teach and to learn. This book suggests that informed and confident teachers should be able to teach the basic movement of letters quite quickly and in such a way that many of the problems that hold children back later on should never occur. This is not a matter of more resources or teaching time, but using them at the right time and in the right way.

Each school will have to decide how to arrange the curriculum to ensure that enough time is allotted for skill training, particularly in the first year of schooling. The more thoroughly handwriting is taught at the beginning the less time will be necessary later on.

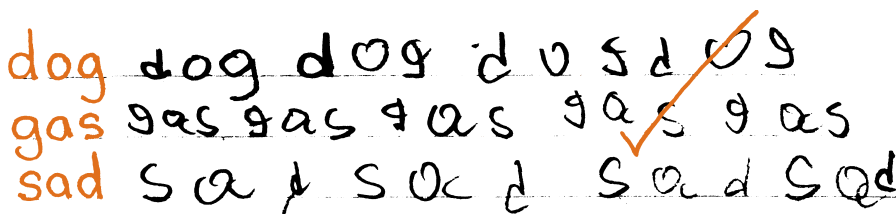


## 2 The relationship between the skill of handwriting and other subjects

In recent years it has been fashionable to allow children to try to copy letters and to record their thoughts from almost their first day at school. The attitude has been to let them play with letters and not correct or teach anything that might inhibit them from expressing their creativity. This may sound delightful, indeed young children's pre-school scribbles are fun for all concerned, but the problems that result from letting this playful attitude to letters continue for too long are only too obvious in our classrooms. Once children can write as much as the letters of their own names, they need to be taught the correct movement of each letter. If this is not done, incorrect movements become habits that are progressively more difficult to alter.

Each school has to decide how to introduce the vital movement training quickly enough so that the most able children do not become frustrated. For those who have not yet started to write, it is easier to give a good foundation within a relatively short time. This can be done through the letter-family technique. This allows a vocabulary of short words to be built up as each group of letters is learned. The temptation to let children try to write down their 'news' each day should be resisted until all the letters can be written with a correct movement in their basic form. Problems can arise with early developers (and their parents). These children are most at risk as they often learn to write at home and may need immediate remedial help to correct movement faults. Their parents will need an explanation, otherwise they may feel that their children are being held back. The children also will need careful handling. They may be proud of their skill, thinking that they have already mastered handwriting.

The fine balance between the standard expected in the 'skill' handwriting class, and in creative writing also needs discussion. It is unrealistic to expect the same level of handwriting when the children's entire concentration is on the letterforms (whether at five or ten years old), and when content and perhaps spelling are uppermost in their minds.



Movement of letters could be corrected in the same way (and at the same time) as spelling.

Most schools already have a realistic outlook on the difference in general quality that might be involved, but what about movement faults? Should they be treated like spelling mistakes and have a correction suggested at the end of a piece of writing? If so, how often can this be done without the risk of inhibiting written expression? Some kind of reminder is however essential to reinforce the correct movement.

### 3 When to introduce handwriting in the reception class

Not all children may be ready to write when they start school. On the other hand there are dangers in leaving children to experiment for too long on their own. These were explained in the last section. Each school must take its own decision about the right time to begin formal teaching. In some districts the majority of pupils may have had pre-school experience. If they are lucky most children may already have gone through the pre-writing stages and have the capacity to start right away on letters. They may already be used to sitting quietly for a short time to concentrate on a specific task; until this happens little can be achieved. Other schools may have a majority of children with little graphic experience, so that few of the necessary skills required for what is undoubtedly a difficult task will have been developed. Even for these children a new and more positive attitude to handwriting might be of benefit. In recent years it has been thought in some way wrong to get young children to sit down and learn a skill. The satisfaction of completing a small but suitable task seems to have been forgotten. Handwriting can give this kind of satisfaction, if the suggested systematic method is carried out in an imaginative way and divided into suitably short and reassuringly repetitive lessons.

Pre-writing patterns can help if they are carefully taught, but perhaps the very best way to foster the skills needed for handwriting is actually to begin to teach the simplest letters as early as possible in a formal teaching situation. Little tension is involved when the need for spelling is removed by using patterns of letters rather than words. The necessary distinction between drawing and writing can begin to be established at the same time.

The opposing attitude is that if children are taught to write too young, at too early a stage of their development, they will soon become discouraged by the inadequacy of their own letters. This warning is important and should not be ignored. Those most at risk of discouragement are children who are particularly clumsy. These children will certainly need more encouragement than their peers. It must be understood by everyone in the school that writing may always be a problem for some children, however much help they receive. With that understanding, praise can be given instead of criticism for the extra effort involved. It may be better to foster the necessary graphic skills slowly through graduated experience with letters, than to delay all writing in the hope that skills will develop on their own. Word processors can be magical for young children, but it would be sad if computers were used as an excuse to delay teaching handwriting. Their function should be to take some of the pressure off young children while they develop their skills, or while they tackle specific handwriting and spelling problems.

## 4 The choice of a handwriting model

The choice of a particular handwriting model must be a whole school decision. First of all there needs to be discussion about whether to have a strict model at all, or to adopt a more liberal attitude to letters. Everyone involved needs to be happy about what they will all have to teach. It must be remembered that at first it may be difficult for some people to change from any other accustomed model.

Four slightly different handwriting models are provided in this book (see pages 6–9). They involve different slants and proportions, as well as alternative forms of some letters. It will not matter if some people dislike some or even all of the letters proposed, because their purpose is to provoke informed discussion about what is essential to teach and what is not. None of them are intended to be models that should be slavishly copied. They illustrate different concepts of letters, and are open to the discussion and criticism that any model should be afforded. Letterforms, even very simple basic ones, are a very personal matter; what one person likes the next may hate. Letters are products of our minds and bodies and reflect our tastes and personalities. Any controversy is welcome in that it supports the underlying purpose of these ‘multiple models’, which is to suggest that children also perceive and produce the proportions and slant of letters in personal and individual ways from very early on. Perhaps these preferences should be tolerated or even encouraged so that all the teaching emphasis can be placed on the vital training of the correct movements of basic letters, rather than close adherence to any particular model.

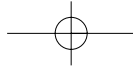
These model alphabets provide several alternatives for those letters where there are often stylistic preferences. Some letters, notably ‘k’, ‘f’ and ‘b’ and perhaps ‘r’, ‘v’ and ‘w’ lend themselves to several acceptable variations. A school may want to decide which form of certain letters should be taught, but whichever is chosen it is likely that the children themselves may soon experiment or adapt on their own.



k k k k f f r r q q b b v w v w

Alternatives are provided for several letters and more can be made, such as a short ‘f’ or angular ‘q’.

There is a case for exposing children to the alternatives fairly early on and letting them make the choice, providing all the alternatives are based on acceptable principles. It should be noted, for instance, that the alternatives for the letter ‘f’ both have descending strokes. Some basic decisions about letterforms need to be taken in order to ensure that the letters that children are first taught and then encouraged to automate, will serve them well all through their school life. If children get used to the idea that ‘f’ is a short letter they may find it difficult to alter later on. When letters are joined, a short ‘f’ can easily be confused with a letter ‘s’.



### Four different ideas for handwriting models

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Alphabet 1: Round and upright.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Alphabet 2: Round and slanting.

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

Alphabet 3: Oval and upright.

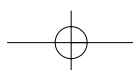
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

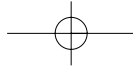
Alphabet 4: Oval and slanting.

The differences between the models are particularly noticeable in the letters 'n' and 'o'.

You will notice that the models within this book all have exit strokes on all the letters that terminate on the baseline. Exit strokes help to promote the flowing movement that develops easily into joins. This is in contrast with the stiff straight letters of print script that terminate abruptly on the baseline. When you use a model, you train the hand in a certain movement. Children who are trained to be neat within the precise movement of print script often find it difficult to progress to a flowing joined writing. With straight print script letters maximum pressure is on the baseline, but with an exit the pencil pressure is relaxed as the upstroke changes direction and lifts towards the next letter. This is what promotes a relaxed flowing writing, whether joined or not. An exit stroke also builds in a space between letters.

The decisions that you make for five-year-olds are likely to have a lasting effect, so the choice of some features of a model is a serious matter. At first glance the four alphabets may appear similar. You need to look closely to notice the differences in slant and proportion. It is not usual to have to discriminate between such details, so this choice of model plays its part in helping you to think carefully about letters.





An upright alphabet arranged in letter families

i l t u y j

r n m h b p k

c a d g q o e

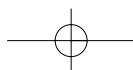
s f v w x z

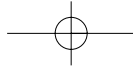
Alternative letters

v w b f f r

q k k k

Characters from the Sassoon family of fonts.





A slanting alphabet arranged in letter families

i l t u y j

r n m h b p k

c a d g q o e

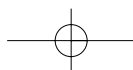
s f v w x z

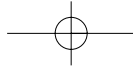
Alternative letters

v w b f f r

q k k k

Characters from the Sassoon family of fonts.





Capital letters can also be taught in stroke-related families

**ILT — FEH**

straight lines

**UJ**

line and arch

**COQGD — PRB**

circular

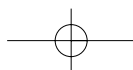
**NMVWYAKX**

diagonal

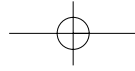
**SZ**

counterchange

Characters from the Sassoon family of fonts.







Joins can be taught in similar groups

*acdehiklmntu*

These letters join easily from the baseline

*orvw ft*

These letters join from the top or the crossbar

*yjgf yjgf*

These letters can be joined with loops or not – as you like

*bpqu bpqu*

These letters can join or not – as you like

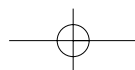
*zx si is*

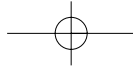
The letters z and x are best not joined. The letter s can be simplified.

*ia ic id ig io iq ie*

A join to this group of letters goes over the top and back, except for e

Characters from the Sassoon family of fonts.





## One way of using the multiple models

The alphabets, the alternative letters and the family groups on pages 6-9 are arranged in such a way that they can be photocopied. If it is considered desirable to have a model in the reception class, but not to enforce too rigid an attitude to letters, the following three-stage policy can be adopted:

### Stage 1

The staff select which of the four suggested models (with any adaptations), and which of the alternative letters are to be used for the children when they are first introduced to writing.

### Stage 2

By the time the children have mastered all the letters in family groups and are starting to write spontaneously, they may also be beginning to indicate their preferred slant and letter proportion. When this happens children whose writing is beginning to differ from the chosen model can be offered desk strips from whichever of the three other models most closely resembles their personal writing.

### Stage 3

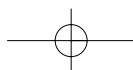
The final step is to let the children produce their own models in the form of desk strips. This gives teachers an opportunity to check that all is well with the children's letters, while giving the pupils the satisfaction of working to their own optimum personal standard. Pupils can update their personal model as often as they like as their handwriting matures.

## If you do not like any of the models

Your school may not want to use any of the suggested models. You might feel, despite all the arguments against it, that you do not yet want to change from print script. There could also be special situations where exit strokes are not suitable, such as when children have to learn a second writing system at the same time as a second language. You can still use the alternative letters to help you to choose your own school model; you can trace over the letter groups omitting the exit strokes to make your own master copy. Details of how to use the family groups for introducing handwriting appear on pages 54-9 in Part 3.

The decision to replace print script by letters with an exit stroke is an important one, it may influence children's handwriting for many years to come. It deserves a considerable amount of thought and perhaps a trial period to convince those who are uncertain about its merits.

A more liberal attitude to slant and proportion however is a different kind of decision. Given a free hand children soon indicate their natural slant and letter proportion. Teachers might profit from an opportunity to observe what happens when essentials are taught systematically but the less essential personal features of slant and proportion are allowed to develop naturally. This may well be the best way forward and it is with this in mind that these multiple models have been introduced.

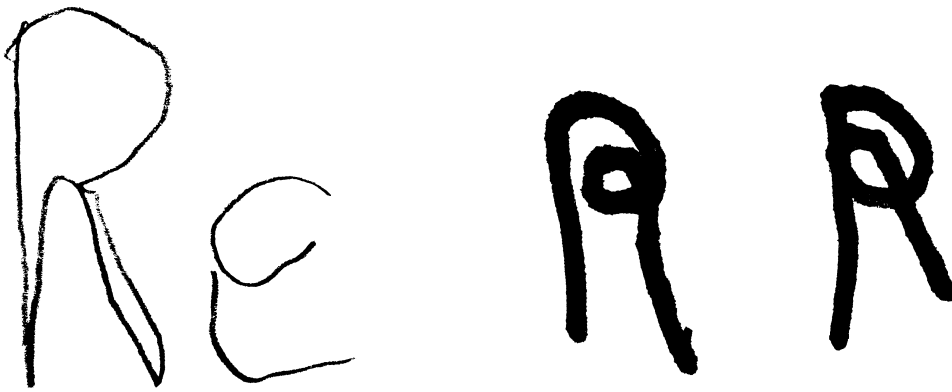


A B C D E F G H I J K L M

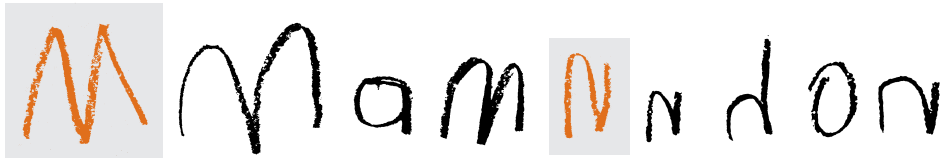
Capital letters

N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

The way capital letters are formed is less important as they do not join. Moreover there are individual ways of writing many of them that are quite acceptable.



When the movement is too bizarre, guidance is obviously needed.



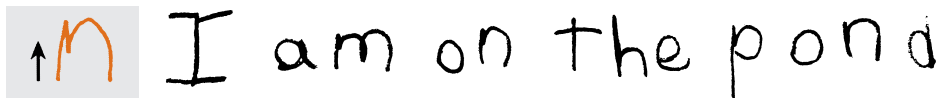
The relationship between the movement of capital letters and small letters can be confusing, particularly in the case of 'M' and 'm', and 'N' and 'n', which resemble each other.

A b c D E f g  
M n o P q

Older children's capitals should be checked from time to time. Look at 'B', 'F', 'G', 'N', 'Q'.

## 5 Balancing movement and neatness

For too long now neatness has been considered the overriding priority in handwriting. This book seeks to alter this by emphasising, above all, the importance of the correct movement of basic letters. When movement is made top priority and the onward movement from letter to letter is encouraged by teaching integral baseline exit strokes, the result may not be as neat as print script letters. With these priorities however, the most important lessons are being learned first so that there will be no need for re-learning later on. Children will need only to refine and speed up their writing with joins as they progress throughout the six years of primary school. Letters that move correctly can be 'neatened' at any stage by slowing down and concentrating only on appearance, but neat letters with an incorrect movement will prevent joining and cause faster writing to become illegible. It is a matter of sensible balance. There is a time and a place for neatness but too much emphasis on it in the early stages can be counterproductive.



Neat printing letters often disguise incorrect movements.

Dear Rachel I hope you have

Letters with forward movement may be less neat than print script.

If you decide on movement as a first priority, then a change of attitude may be needed by all the staff. You will have to praise writing that moves correctly rather than (or as well as) writing that is just beautifully neat. If too much emphasis is put on neatness you will be inhibiting the forward movement that will lead to early joining. It is usually accepted that when children start to join letters their writing looks less neat until they become practised in their joins. With the method that is suggested here the real work is done at the early stages and the results in terms of neatness will be evident later on; the added benefit will be that by the end of primary school the children should have a relaxed and flowing handwriting to serve them well in secondary school and beyond.

Writing this neat is a  
waste of time.

Writing like this is much better.

This writer has a realistic attitude. Handwriting should be fast as well as legible.

## 6 How much emphasis on joining

This difficult issue will have to be part of the whole school's policy. For many years in Great Britain little emphasis has been put on joins. Children are supposed to be taught how to join from the time they enter junior school, at about the age of seven years. However with the emphasis elsewhere, either on neatness of the actual letters or only on the content of written work, a large proportion of pupils do not develop a confident joined or semi-joined hand by the time they leave for secondary school. When they are faced with speeding up their writing it all falls apart and many pupils revert to separate letters.

It could be argued that the sensible thing to do is to teach children to join all their letters all the time as was done in this country fifty years ago. This does not seem to work well either. In many countries national models are still based on old-fashioned copperplate writing and children are taught to join all their letters. This seems to work quite well until the need for speed arises. Ten-year-old pupils may be able to reach a calligraphic standard when writing slowly in a looped cursive, but in secondary school many of them have to revert to printing. Only with luck do they eventually develop a simpler semi-cursive.

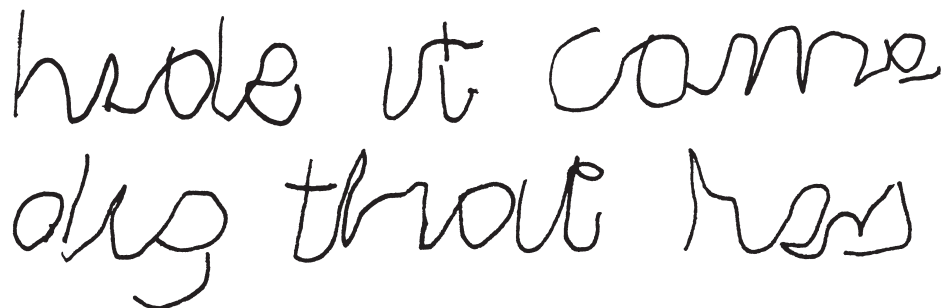
tennis, football and cricket.  
My hair is brown, my skin  
is brown, <sup>and</sup> my eyes are hazel.  
I am tall. My hair is flicked.

The same girl at eleven and thirteen. Her continuous cursive broke down at speed.

The eye is like a camera.  
lens - cornea collects light.  
The lens focuses by the muscles.

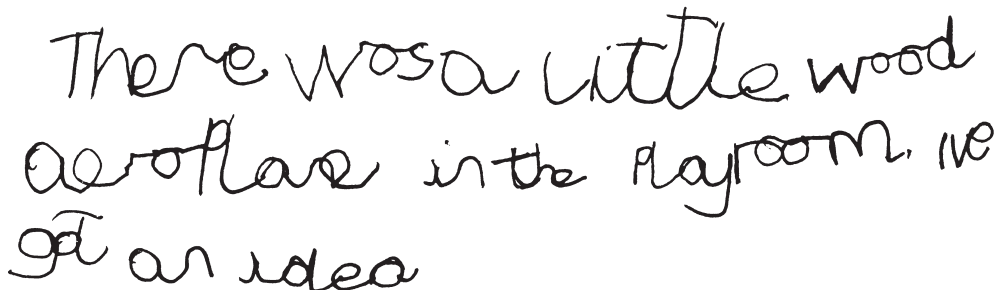
The reason for this is clear; the hand needs a chance to move along the line, so penlifts are not only permissible but essential during long words. If children are trained to write continuous cursive, they find it not only difficult to alter the movement but difficult to space letters when they do stop for a penlift. You will have to decide how to ensure that all children know how to perform the different joins, without going too far and giving them the idea that they must join every letter all the time. There is at present some talk about the desirability of using continuous cursive to help with the teaching of spelling. This idea needs careful consideration. At the time that such assistance is needed with spelling, the words that the children will be using will

probably be limited to four or five letters. When the continuous joining concept and movement is taught from an early age it will last well beyond the stage where it is a help with spelling. Poor spellers often find ten or twelve letter words easier to work out when they are broken up into smaller sections. Something that was taught as a temporary help for young children learning to spell can become a considerable hindrance to the development of an efficient relaxed handwriting, and a disadvantage for more advanced spelling too. Common letter sequences, and common two or three letter words are useful practice when young children are learning to join, but a sensible balance is needed. Children profit by learning to join when it is comfortable and quicker for them to do so, but they also need to understand that penlifts are not only desirable but help make the hand and the writing work more efficiently.



hole it came  
dig through now

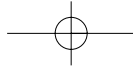
These words were traced by a five-year-old in a school where letters are supposed to be joined from the start. Tracing may be beneficial in certain circumstances but needs careful supervision. This is an example of how ridiculous, and even harmful tracing can be when it encourages the incorrect movement of letters and joins.



There wosa little wood  
aeroflax in the playroom. He  
got an idea

Not surprisingly, a year later, pupils in the same school display many letters with an incorrect movement. Children should never be encouraged to join before they have internalised the correct movement of basic letters.

There are two further points to consider: not all young children have the co-ordination to perform more than the simple baseline joins when they start school at the age of five, so a rigid policy of continuous cursive from the start may handicap a proportion of children. Finally, it cannot be repeated too often that children should never be taught joins until all their letters move correctly.



## 7 Display writing – both by teachers and pupils

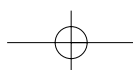
One final argument in favour of print script remains to be dispelled. It is that handwriting should look like the print in early reading books. Children see letters of all kinds on television and in advertisements and soon learn to decipher the different forms of the various letters. Having thus disposed of the need to teach print-like letters for the sake of recognition, this is a good moment to look at all the letterforms that appear on the school walls. If you are going to use a model that has exit strokes on all letters that terminate on the baseline, then you will need to make sure that all handwritten exemplars have exit strokes.

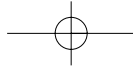
You are going to need a coherent policy for all display writing. It may be difficult for teachers who have long been used to writing print script to be consistent in producing separate letters with exit strokes. In fact this is exactly what children have had to do for so long – to change from print script to letters with ‘hooks’ on them before they are able to join. Teachers should be able to feel as well as see the difference in the letters so that they understand the reason for the change in policy. It may not be so easy to write separate letters (or joined ones) that are free of personal eccentricities. Children are quick to copy and often exaggerate any such quirks, but in coming to terms with their own handwriting, teachers will gain invaluable insight into the kinds of problems that their pupils have to face.

If you are encouraging children to join up their letters, you will have to decide if and when joined writing should be used on the blackboard or on classroom notices. The argument against using joined writing in the classroom has always been that it is more difficult for children to read. This may be valid in certain cases such as children with learning difficulties, but even so it is often claimed that joined letters emphasise the word shape and help recognition. Anyhow it is rather a negative attitude when pupils are being encouraged to join their own letters. Providing the adult writing is kept clear and simple it should help those children who are beginning to join their letters and will certainly provide them with a good example.

The priority that you are giving to the correct movement of letters rather than to conventional neatness may lead to new attitudes to the examples of pupils’ handwriting on display. You will be praising and therefore displaying examples where the writing moves freely and begins to join quite early on. If you require particularly neat examples for a special occasion you can explain that all through life we need ‘special occasion’ handwriting as well as everyday handwriting. Important letters have to be drafted and redrafted as grammar and spelling are improved, and it is usually only the final one that is copied out slowly to ensure the best possible layout and handwriting. In this way you can encourage a high standard without leaving children with the idea that all writing must be perfect, because that requires too much concentration on neatness when more emphasis should be on content.

Children need to be taught how to lay out a page. Special occasions provide ideal opportunities to show how much difference good presentation can make.



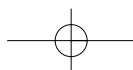


## 8 Liaison with pre-school groups, parents and other schools

When you have formulated your new policy it is a good idea to let both associated pre-school groups and parents know what you have decided and why. It will help if all concerned know that capital letters are not the best way to teach pre-school children to write. It is also helpful if pre-school groups can make sure that if children are writing their own names they are shown the correct movement of those letters. It may be unrealistic to expect parents to monitor the movement of their young children's first letters, but both parents and pre-school groups can play an important part in teaching pre-writing skills. A demonstration in the form of a 'new parents' evening may be effective; it provides an opportunity to explain the importance of the correct movement. If all concerned understand the concepts behind the alphabet these vital ideas can be demonstrated and practised informally. In this way children are prepared for the task that awaits them on entering school. These ideas, such as left-to-right movement and discrimination between heights and mirror images, can be introduced in informal situations. They can be explored kinaesthetically through three dimensional play with whatever materials are available in the home or playgroup, as well as visually.

When it comes to the first year at school, parents need to understand that the emphasis on the movement of writing means that the handwriting may not appear as neat as their older children's print script did. The children will be better off in the end as they have plenty of time to refine their writing without having to alter their letters. If you decide to allow children to start to join their letters as soon as appropriate, then again explanation will be needed. Parents who themselves may never have been taught to join can respond by claiming that this emphasis on handwriting is repressive. They need an explanation that your skill lessons are not reverting to old-fashioned ideas, but making life easier for their children in the long term. As parents begin to understand how important it is for children to have adequate writing and how difficult it is for them when they begin, those same parents will start to realise the part that they might play in helping their pre-school children. In the developed world young children are given fewer and fewer real tasks to perform before they go to school. Their hand-eye co-ordination is not developed nor the important discrimination that is needed to recognise or reproduce details of letters. Television may widen childrens' general knowledge but it does not give them the foundation for accurate skills. Parents who realise this can do so much to help their children by playing all the tried and tested old-fashioned games that develop these faculties, and by giving time to help pre-school children with real tasks around the home or garden.

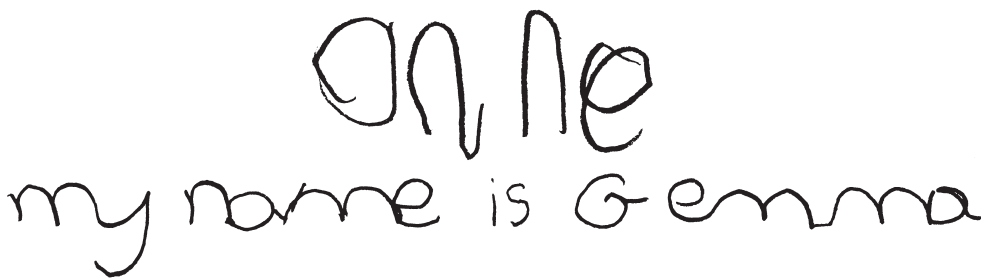
How this information is spread is obviously up to individual schools, but many infant schools already provide lively leaflets to explain what they are trying to do and how parents can help.







Pre-school groups and parents can help with specific pre-writing exercises if they are informed of the importance of such concepts as directionality and mirror images. They can then ensure that children learn the correct movement of the letters at least within their own names. This child has both directionality and letter movement problems.



Names may need more attention later on. They are often the first letters that children attempt to join.

Liaison between primary schools in the same area can also be a great help. Not only can they produce a uniform policy that will benefit their pupils but they can also pool resources such as inservice training sessions and learn from each others' experiences. If primary and secondary schools were to meet occasionally there could be even greater benefits. Feedback can be available to junior schools to show any difficulties that their own (ex)pupils are having in dealing with the speed, pressure and new priorities in secondary schools. A positive consequence may be modifications in the policy for top juniors, with more emphasis on speed to prepare them for the changeover. Together the schools can discuss the real problem: that unless pupils have learned the correct movement of basic letters it is inadvisable for them to be encouraged to join up their writing. At whatever stage basic movement faults are detected they must be dealt with, but teachers must also be aware that determining the rights and wrongs of personal movement between letters is not so straightforward. Many personal joins remain perfectly legible and enable pupils to speed up their writing. All of this points to the need for teachers of all subjects to be more informed about handwriting.

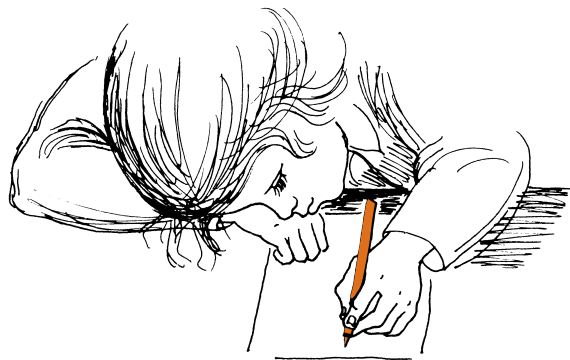
## 9 A policy for left-handers

Left-handers need consideration, especially in the early years when they are forming their handwriting strategies. In countries where left-handers' needs are written into the curriculum it appears that far fewer of them end up with problems. Handwriting problems have such far-reaching effects on all school work that unless care is taken with our left-handed pupils, some may not achieve their potential. The commonsense rules are well documented. In essence they are as follows:

1. Paper should be placed to the writers left side, then slanted to suit each individual. This allows writers to have their hand below the line, in a non-inverted position, without interrupting their line of vision.
2. Free-flowing modern pens that do not smudge are recommended for left-handers.
3. A seat high enough to allow the writers to see over their hand is a help, and appropriate lighting to make sure that left-handers are not writing in the shadow of their own hand.
4. The pen needs to be held far enough from the point to allow the writer to see the written trace. This may result in a feeling of loss of control, but it is only the thumb that gets in the way; the index finger can be as near to the point as the writer wishes.

Many of these points are dependent on the teacher; for instance the children cannot place the paper to their left side if there is not enough space at the table, or if they are sitting on their right-handed neighbour's right side. Left-handers will all be writing in the shadow of their own hand if the room is organised for right-handers.

There are other more subtle points that are seldom mentioned. Many books are arranged with the material to copy on the left side and the space on the right side. This will mean that left-handers may be covering the copy as they write. Copybooks could be designed for left-handers with the layout reversed: the blank page for writing on the left side and the information to be copied on the right side.



Most left-handers need to place their paper to their left side so they can see what they have written. Otherwise they may bend over sideways or twist their wrist above the line of writing.

What about a special model for left-handers? Many young children will produce writing that slopes backwards as it is more difficult for left-handers to slant their letters forwards. Why should they always be confronted with a model that they may not be able to follow? One with a slight backwards slant may encourage them.

It is difficult for left-handers to follow the movements when they are demonstrated by a right-hander. Teachers should try to demonstrate individually to left-handers using their left hand. The resulting writing may not be very neat but it will help pupils. It could also help right-handers to understand the specific problems that left-handers face.

# backward sloping

A backward-sloping model might encourage left-handers whose writing slants backwards.

Though criticised at school, this left-hander could not alter her slant. Changing her paper position might help but the necessary manipulation of the fingers is lacking.

Some left-handers may experience directional problems and will need special attention. Their difficulties are not easily understood. If, for example, right-handers try to write with their left hand they may find, as most left-handers do, that it is easiest to draw a line from right to left. All children need to be taught that writing (and reading) go from left to right, but left-handers may need much more practice in left-to-right exercises before this becomes the automatic response to an empty page. Some kind of visual reminder may be a good idea. This can be a simple red margin or red strip put at the left side of each page, or something more fun as suggested on page 71. Letter movement may be a problem too. Left-handers seem to find the clockwise movement easier than the anti-clockwise one that is needed for so many letters. The letter 'o' is often a problem and this may affect the associated letters 'a' 'd' 'g' and 'q' as well. In some cases the right-to-left movement of some or even all letters may go undetected for several years. Pupils get used to starting letters at the place where they would normally end. This is bad enough with separate letters, but the real difficulties appear when pupils find that they cannot join their letters. It may not be easy to detect this movement problem. Extra-wide or uneven spacing between letters can also be an indicator, but older pupils manage to adapt so it may not be obvious unless the writer is watched in action. Once such problems are diagnosed it may be a long time before writers are able to alter the movement of their letters. Early detection and remediation are vital. All these aspects need to be woven into a policy that spreads awareness of left-handers' needs and ensures that they are met.

## 10 A policy for special needs

Most schools designate one teacher to be responsible for special needs. This does not always mean that the chosen teacher has received the thorough training that is needed to diagnose and then deal with the complex problems that are so prevalent in our schools. Ideally children should have their problems diagnosed accurately and receive adequate individual attention and remedial help from informed specialists. Even this would probably not be enough; all the good done in individual sessions can be destroyed quite easily when the children return to the classroom.

Children with learning difficulties have very little self-confidence, and this lack of confidence will be mirrored in their handwriting. They will have little control over the tensions that can distort their letters, so any policy has to involve co-operation between teachers. This should ensure that children with real problems meet with encouragement and sympathy and not too much criticism in their every-day work.

A shank is the single  
ferocious predator on  
phantom in the stomach  
great white tus seals and  
sealion was found

*Clumsy children cannot help their awkwardness being reflected in their handwriting.*

Within a school it should not be difficult to keep class and subject teachers aware of any areas where reinforcement and encouragement might be beneficial, but difficulties can arise when children are released from class for individual tuition, or have such tuition outside school hours.

Many children, whose learning difficulties show through in their handwriting, have organisational difficulties too. The word 'dyspraxia' is often used to describe this condition which may affect the organisation of physical actions and hence handwriting. Such organisational problems can overlap into other areas of daily life. Children who are affected, may for example, continually forget their homework or leave their sports equipment at home. They may have difficulty copying notices from the board, and should they have missed instructions because they were out of the classroom for extra tuition, any resulting confusion can be magnified. Putting on clothes may present a complicated ordeal, and remembering messages a near impossibility. A school might find it useful to keep in close contact with parents to minimise such problems. In extreme cases a computerised pocket organiser can help.

A policy for special needs means that everyone has a part to play in supporting children with problems without disrupting the smooth running of the school.

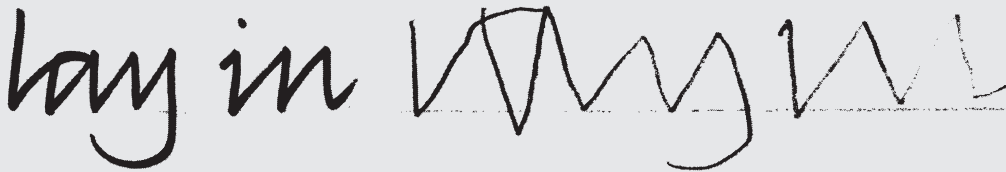
## 11 A policy for newcomers from other schools

New pupils may join the school at any time so there will always be decisions to make about how to assess and integrate newcomers. It is not easy for a child coming to a new school. Everything may be different and one of the most visible differences can be the handwriting. If there is a policy of ensuring the correct movement of letters then some kind of tactful assessment will be needed to see that a new pupil's letters have no important movement faults. That will be relatively easy once teachers become adept at spotting, explaining and dealing with such matters, but stylistic differences or joining differences need more thought. Supposing children had been taught a somewhat idiosyncratic italic while your pupils had had a less strict or obvious model? Supposing that they had either learned a continuous looped cursive, or at the other extreme had become confirmed in a fast print script, at the age when your children were being shown how to join as and where comfortable? Should the new pupils be encouraged to follow what the other children were doing, or continue their original taught model? Some newcomers may wish to conform as soon as possible, in which case they deserve the extra help to make any alterations. This might be the case where a top junior child had not yet started to join any letters. Other pupils may be both happy and competent in their habitual model, in which case it will be unfair and to their disadvantage to expect them to alter. In practice this more liberal attitude means more work for teachers. They need to be informed of the details of the different writing models and how some of them may need to be modified so that older pupils can develop a fast personal handwriting.

It is not only children who may be affected by changing schools. Teachers who may have come from a school with quite different views on handwriting may also need guidance. If they have not been trained how to detect and deal with movement problems they should be made aware of the importance of this part of the school policy, whatever the age of the pupils that they are to teach. Stylistic differences may not be such a problem. It might be quite useful for older pupils to be exposed to another style of writing, provided it moves correctly and is free of personal idiosyncracies. It is notoriously difficult for an adult to become consistent in a new handwriting model. This difficulty could be explained to the pupils as another lesson on the realities of writing. It might be far better for an unusual form of a letter – for instance 'f' – to become a point of discussion than for the teacher to be trying unsuccessfully to mimic a model that is unfamiliar.

With young children, however, it may be necessary to be more consistent with such details as exit strokes on letters. Where this is an important part of the school policy new teachers should be encouraged to practise this until exit strokes become more or less automatic. This means not only on the blackboard but when marking children's books as well.

Stylistic problems arising from various handwriting models

lay in 

If italic is perceived or produced as a zig-zag, resulting problems can be difficult to retrain.

an am an am

It is difficult to adapt a model that does not come naturally.

I hate the knew kind of writing

This seven-year-old had round writing and hated the new oval model.

I hate the knew kind

We had a pleasant walk today  
over the hills and far away

This seven-year-old had to follow the school model, but her natural writing was narrower.

We had a pleasant w today, offer lf for  
the hills and far away

lf for and offer left  
lf for offer left

Adults also have problems. This teacher's personal crossbar, rising diagonally from below the baseline, misled her into teaching the 'f' join in the school model along the baseline.

## 12 Terminology

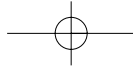
Unfortunately there is at present no adequate and universally agreed terminology to describe the various features of handwriting. Even the terminology to describe the stages of children in school varies considerably, not only between countries but within them. (The terms used in this book are set out below.) However, it is important within any one school to have and to use consistent and sufficiently precise terms, so that everyone understands exactly what is being discussed. Different kinds of letters need naming. Should letters still be referred to as 'upper and lower case' after the outdated way that typographers stored their lead type, or should more child-orientated terms such as 'capital and small letters' be used? Parts of letters have specific names, and once these are defined there can be a much clearer idea of the complexities of handwriting. The lines that mark the heights of letters also need defining and in doing so teachers may become aware of the importance of height differentials.

Terms that describe joining are often inadequate and can lead to misunderstanding. Print and cursive are two terms that are frequently used to describe unjoined or joined writing respectively. Print has other connotations and can be taken to refer to the straight forms of 'print script', thus perpetuating the myth that these are the only letters that young children should be exposed to. The term 'cursive' can have several meanings and none of them are precise. To some people the word suggests the old-fashioned looped writing, where every letter is supposed to be joined all the time. Other people take the term to describe the simplified cursive introduced by Marion Richardson, where descenders are never meant to join. Others think it just means joined-up, and only when they are asked how much joining does this suggest, or how often are there penlifts in their own writing do they begin to comprehend how imprecise this term is. Separate letters, letters that touch, and letters that join may all be present and quite acceptable in a short passage of writing. More precise terms such as continuous cursive or semi-cursive may lead to a better understanding of how an efficient personal writing works.

'The movement of writing' is a term used in this book. The use of this phrase may be unfamiliar to those who have always judged letters by their formation or perhaps their shape. The word 'movement' ties the letters to the hand that writes, so that it is

### Terms relating age to the year and level in schools

Year	Age	Level	Other terms used in this book
1-2	5-6	Infant	Reception, middle infants, top infants
3-6	7-10	Junior	First-year juniors to top juniors
7-13	11-18	Secondary	



### Some terms relating to letters

#### Parts of letters



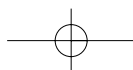
#### Lines and heights



#### Different kinds of letters

Print script (Written sanserif letters)	<i>hid</i>
Written letters with exit strokes	<i>hid</i>
A sanserif typeface (helvetica bold)	<b>hid</b>
Sassoon Primary typeface (Sanserif, ascending strokes and baseline exit strokes)	<i>hid</i>
Semi-cursive (Marion Richardson)	<i>fly eight</i>
Continuous looped cursive	<i>yes bet</i>

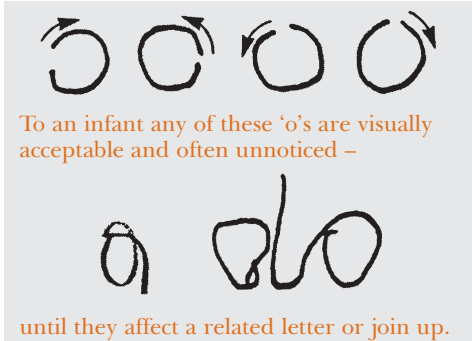
Some aspects of letters have specific terms but what do we call ordinary writing that is usually a mixture of joined, touching and separate letters, developed by individuals to suit themselves and their tasks?



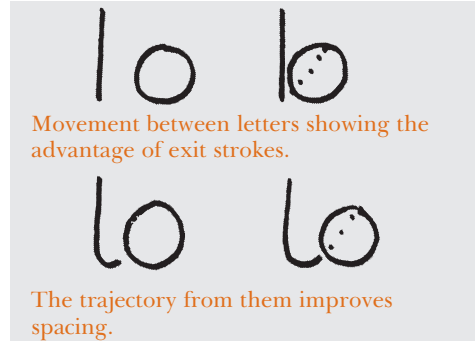


## The importance of movement both on and off the paper

### Movement on the paper



### Movement both off and on paper



The movement of the hand when the pen is on the paper produces what we see as letters. The movements that the hand performs when it is off the paper are just as important because this can influence the efficiency as well as the spacing of letters.

easy to explain that the hand is being trained in a movement. Shape or even formation when used in relation to letters, are more static descriptors that could ignore the vital direction or trajectory of the strokes that make up our written letters. Maybe it is imprecise terminology that has led to the present position where the incorrect movement of letters is so prevalent in our children's handwriting. The importance of movement is not appreciated and movement faults are often ignored.

A discussion of terminology in any staffroom may reveal any other misunderstandings. Developing a working terminology within the school can do more than clarify the meaning of words; it may provide the insight to observe the details of what is actually happening in the classroom.

Children need to have consistent terms used in the classroom. It is suggested on page 45 that in the early years children can invent their own words for some of the aspects of handwriting, and these can be adopted in the classroom. This should be encouraged as it brings the subject to life, but any newcomers to the school, whether staff or pupils, may need those terms defining.

The term 'writing' itself is used in different ways. A complaint at the end of an essay saying 'badly written' may apply either to handwriting or to content, or even to both. Handwriting may be criticised as 'messy' because of frequent erasures. In some cases poor spelling would be the real cause of the untidy page and all the rubbings-out. 'Untidy' can refer as much to the layout of a page as to the letters themselves. All this imprecise criticism is of little help to the unhappy writer who may not know how or what to improve.

The term 'correct' may also be confusing in relation to handwriting. What is correct other than the correct movement of basic letters? Many preconceived ideas of what is conventionally correct or incorrect, whether referring to letters or to such matters as penhold, may be personal and subjective. All these matters need unemotional examination – but informed discussion requires precise terms.

### 13 Assessment and record keeping

Some record of pupils' handwriting is desirable, especially during the early years of implementing a new policy. This can be at a class level as the job of each teacher. Any examples should be representative of writing for different tasks. There should be fast writing perhaps from dictation, and slow, show writing as well. There should also be samples from good and poor writers. This can give a realistic picture of how a policy is working overall. It may take a few years for the results to become evident at the top of a school, in terms of more flowing and efficient handwriting. Such improvement may never be able to be proven statistically, other perhaps than in the matter of a reduction in movement faults. When children begin to enjoy the act of writing, when their actual letters reflect a more relaxed attitude and when their personal handwriting gains in speed and confidence to enable them to express their thoughts freely (and legibly) on paper, all the effort will have been worthwhile. Norms should not be taken too seriously. Pupils need eventually to acquire a mature writing that suits their own needs and personality, at school and later in life, and they cannot and should not have to conform to a common measure.

Children get satisfaction from keeping samples of their own writing and watching it improve. If schools adopt the idea of children producing their own model strips, then perhaps pupils should be encouraged to keep these, along with other examples, in a special handwriting folder. If children are encouraged to judge their own handwriting, for their own benefit, they may develop the self-criticism and motivation that is needed to make real progress.

AMANA  
Amanda

Names written shortly after entering school in September and again three months later. A record like this is satisfying for both pupil and teacher. It is a justification for a systematic method of teaching, and proof (two of many such examples from this school) that it is quite possible to alter the movement of young children's letters.

graham  
graham