



Handwriting Policy

High expectations, fluent transcription and pride in presentation

Policy information	Details
Policy owner	Headteacher
Approved by	Governing Body
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Version	1.0

"A Doorway to a Life of Love and Learning in the Light of Christ."

1. Purpose and rationale

At St Mary's Catholic Primary School, handwriting is taught as an essential element of communication and as part of the wider process of becoming a confident writer. Fluent, legible handwriting reduces the demands of transcription so that pupils can devote more attention to vocabulary, composition and the expression of ideas. We want every pupil to develop an efficient, comfortable and personal hand, and to take pride in presenting work that communicates care for themselves, their learning and the reader.

This policy establishes a consistent whole school approach. It should be read alongside the, curriculum, assessment, marking and feedback, SEND, accessibility and equality policies. The school uses Nelson Handwriting as its principal teaching resource; teachers apply its progression consistently while adapting teaching to pupils' developmental and additional needs.

2. Aims

Through explicit teaching, regular practice and consistent expectations, pupils will:

- develop the gross- and fine-motor control needed for comfortable, efficient writing
- form letters and numerals accurately, with consistent orientation, size and proportion
- use an appropriate pencil grip, posture and paper position without unnecessary tension
- develop an increasingly fluent, legible and appropriately joined style
- write at a speed that supports sustained composition while maintaining legibility
- understand when joined, unjoined or digital presentation is most appropriate
- develop independence in checking and improving presentation
- experience success through appropriate scaffolding, intervention and reasonable adjustment

3. Statutory and curriculum context

The policy reflects the expectations for physical development and writing in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the statutory handwriting requirements within the National Curriculum for English. In summary, pupils move from secure physical foundations and correct letter formation to increasingly accurate size, spacing and orientation; diagonal and horizontal joins; improved quality, consistency and speed; and the independent selection of an appropriate writing implement and style.

Teachers retain professional judgement. A pupil's handwriting should never prevent them from demonstrating curriculum knowledge, and handwriting difficulty must not be mistaken for weak understanding or limited ideas.

4. Equality, inclusion and reasonable adjustments

All pupils are entitled to effective handwriting teaching. The intended outcome is functional, legible and sufficiently fluent communication; identical physical performance is not required from every pupil. Expectations are ambitious but proportionate, and adjustments are based on assessed need rather than diagnosis alone.

Possible adjustments include:

- additional modelling, overlearning, shorter practice periods and reduced copying
- larger line spacing, highlighted baselines, visual prompts, writing slopes or alternative paper positioning
- adapted pencils or pens, grips, seating, foot support and opportunities for movement
- alternative methods of recording, including a scribe, word processor, speech-to-text or assistive technology
- separate assessment of composition and transcription where appropriate
- advice from the SENCO and relevant occupational therapy or specialist services.

Left handed pupils are taught explicitly: paper is positioned slightly to the left and angled clockwise; the pencil is held far enough from the point to keep writing visible; the wrist remains below the writing line where possible; and seating avoids elbow collision. Staff do not require a left handed pupil to copy a right handed movement that causes discomfort.

5. Whole-school teaching approach

5.1 Explicit instruction

Handwriting is taught directly, not left to incidental correction. New formations and joins are modelled at an appropriate scale with clear verbal cues. Teachers draw attention to starting point, direction, orientation, relative size, position on the line, spacing and, when relevant, the exit stroke and join. Pupils then practise with immediate feedback before applying the focus in meaningful writing.

5.2 The teaching sequence

1. Prepare: check posture, position, grip, equipment and readiness; use brief gross- or fine-motor preparation where helpful.
2. Model: demonstrate the movement and verbalise the formation or join; show a correct example and, where useful, a carefully chosen non-example.
3. Practise: pupils rehearse the movement in the air, on a large surface or orally before recording; practice is short and purposeful.
4. Apply: pupils use the focus in words, phrases, sentences or current curriculum vocabulary.
5. Review: pupils and adults identify success against the focus and select one precise next step.

5.3 Frequency

Handwriting is taught frequently enough to secure automaticity. The following is the minimum expectation; teachers increase frequency when assessment identifies a need.

Phase	Minimum planned provision
EYFS	Daily opportunities within provision, supported by regular adult-led fine-motor, pattern and letter-formation teaching.
Years 1-2	Short, explicit sessions at least four times each week, alongside application in phonics and writing.
Years 3-4	At least three focused sessions each week until formations and joins are secure; thereafter a minimum of two maintenance sessions.
Years 5-6	At least one focused maintenance/application session each week, increased for individuals or cohorts where fluency or legibility is insecure.

5.4 Consistent language and modelling

Staff use the terminology and formation guidance within Nelson Handwriting consistently. Classroom models, working walls and individual prompts should match what pupils are being taught. Adults model the school's agreed handwriting when writing for pupils, including on boards, displays and in books, while recognising that printed typefaces will not always mirror handwritten formation.

5.5 Handwriting and phonics

In Reception and Key Stage 1, handwriting teaching is coordinated with the school's phonics programme. The spoken sound, grapheme and handwriting movement are linked without overloading pupils. Letter names may be used where appropriate, but adults avoid teaching conflicting formation cues. Accuracy of formation takes priority over premature speed or joining.

6. Physical foundations and classroom conditions

Element	Agreed expectation
Posture	Feet supported; bottom towards the back of the chair; body upright and relaxed; shoulders level; forearms supported comfortably.
Paper	Stabilised with the non-writing hand and angled to suit handedness. Pupils have enough space to move the writing arm freely.
Grip	A comfortable, efficient grip is taught and encouraged. A dynamic tripod grip is often effective, but functional alternatives are accepted where writing is controlled and pain-free.
Distance	Pupils can see the writing clearly without leaning excessively close. Vision concerns are reported promptly.
Equipment	Pencils are sharp and of suitable hardness; pens write smoothly; adaptations are available where needed.
Duration	Practice remains focused. Staff stop or adjust activity if a pupil experiences pain, marked fatigue or increasing loss of control.

7. Progression in handwriting

Progression is cumulative. Pupils continue to receive teaching from an earlier stage when prerequisite control or formation is insecure; this is responsive teaching, not a lowering of ambition.

Stage	Core teaching and expected development
EYFS	Develop shoulder, arm, wrist, hand and finger strength through purposeful play. Establish bilateral coordination, crossing the midline, tool control and pattern making. Teach an efficient grip and accurate formation of taught lower case letters, capitals and numerals, beginning at the correct point and moving in the correct direction. Write recognisable letters, increasingly on a line, and use writing meaningfully across provision.
Year 1	Sit and hold a pencil comfortably and correctly. Form lower-case letters in the correct direction, starting and finishing in the right place. Form capitals and digits 0-9. Understand which letters belong to handwriting families and practise them together. Develop appropriate spacing between words. Letters are not routinely joined until formation is secure.
Year 2	Form lower-case letters of the correct size relative to one another. Begin to use the diagonal and horizontal strokes needed for joining and join when appropriate. Write capitals and digits of the correct size, orientation and relationship to lower case. Use word spacing that reflects the size of letters.
Years 3-4	Use diagonal and horizontal joins with increasing consistency; understand which adjacent letters are best left unjoined. Improve legibility through consistent letter size, parallel downstrokes and appropriately spaced lines. Increase fluency and begin to develop a reliable, efficient style across subjects.
Years 5-6	Write legibly, fluently and with increasing speed. Choose which letter shape and whether or not to join for clarity and efficiency. Choose the writing implement best suited to the task. Sustain an effective style across longer pieces, note-making and curriculum subjects while developing an individual hand within agreed standards.

8. Letter formation, joining and capitals

- Lower case letters are taught with correct starting points and directional movement. Pupils are not expected to add unnecessary lead-in strokes.
- Joining begins when letter formation, orientation and placement are secure enough for joining to improve rather than reduce fluency and legibility.
- Joins are taught systematically through the Nelson progression. Pupils learn that not every adjacent pair should be joined.
- Capital letters are not joined. They are used accurately for sentence openings and proper nouns and are appropriately proportioned.
- Numerals are formed consistently and are clearly distinguishable from letters.
- The principal aim is an efficient and legible hand; ornate or highly stylised writing is not required for everyday work.

9. Writing implements and the move to pen

Pupils begin with a suitable pencil. Transition to pen is based on readiness from Year 5 rather than a fixed age or reward. A pupil is ready when handwriting is consistently formed, legible, appropriately sized and spaced, sufficiently fluent, and produced with controlled pressure. Teachers may ask pupils to use pencil for mathematics, diagrams, drafting or other tasks where alteration is expected. The school specifies approved handwriting pens that flow smoothly and do not encourage excessive pressure. Erasable pens are used only where agreed by the school.

The right to use a pen is not withdrawn as a punishment. If presentation deteriorates, the teacher identifies the underlying need and provides focused teaching or a temporary task-specific adjustment.

10. Presentation expectations

Presentation supports communication but should not overshadow curriculum learning. Expectations are taught, displayed in an accessible form and applied consistently across subjects, with reasonable adjustments recorded where needed.

Area	Whole-school expectation
Books	Work is completed in the correct book and kept free from avoidable damage or graffiti.
Date and LC's	Dates and Learning Challenges follow the agreed phase convention of top left, underlined and are presented clearly. Learning challenges are identified in accordance with the marking and feedback policy.

Writing	Pupils use their best reasonably fluent handwriting, place letters on the line and maintain appropriate size and spacing.
Mistakes	Mistakes are corrected neatly using the agreed method, normally a single ruled line. Correction fluid is not used.
Diagrams	Lines and labels are drawn neatly, using a ruler where appropriate. Labels are positioned clearly and do not cross unnecessarily.
Photocopies	Sheets are trimmed if needed and fixed securely and straight, without obscuring prior work.
Digital work	Typing is taught and used purposefully. Digital presentation does not remove the entitlement to handwriting instruction unless an agreed adjustment applies.

11. Feedback and assessment

Assessment is primarily formative and proportionate. Teachers observe pupils during handwriting as well as reviewing finished work. Feedback is specific and manageable, focusing on the taught feature or the most important barrier to legibility or fluency.

Teachers consider:

- posture, grip, handedness, comfort and stamina
- starting points, direction and orientation
- size, proportion, placement on the line and spacing
- accuracy and consistency of joins
- legibility to an unfamiliar reader
- fluency and speed appropriate to the task
- transfer of the taught style into independent writing and other subjects

Evidence comes from lesson observation and pupils' everyday writing rather than a single copied sample. At least termly, teachers review progress against the phase expectations and identify pupils needing further teaching. Handwriting may contribute to statutory writing judgements only in accordance with the relevant assessment framework; staff must not impose additional non statutory thresholds.

12. Responding to difficulty and intervention

Where a pupil is not making expected progress, the teacher first identifies the likely barrier. Intervention is precise, time limited and additional to high quality classroom teaching. It should not repeatedly remove a pupil from the same valued curriculum experience.

Observed difficulty	Possible response
Weak control or rapid fatigue	Check seating, shoulder stability, core strength, grip pressure and task length; provide purposeful motor practice and seek specialist advice if persistent.
Reversals or inconsistent formation	Return to explicit directional modelling, multisensory rehearsal and a small number of target letters; coordinate with phonics.
Poor size or line placement	Use enlarged modelling, highlighted baselines, appropriately spaced lines and visual reference points.
Crowded or excessive spacing	Model spacing in words and between words; use a temporary spacer or visual cue, then fade it.
Slow but accurate writing	Build automaticity through short, frequent practice and familiar text; reduce unnecessary copying while maintaining composition.
Illegible joining	Secure individual formations and selected joins before extending; allow strategic unjoining where clearer.
Persistent significant need	Consult the SENCO; consider assessment, individual provision and alternative recording or assistive technology.

13. Roles and responsibilities

The governing body

- approves the policy and assures itself that it supports an ambitious, inclusive curriculum;
- receives appropriate information about implementation and impact through the school's monitoring arrangements.

The headteacher and senior leaders

- ensure the policy is implemented consistently and resourced appropriately
- provide staff development and address variation in expectations
- ensure handwriting sits coherently within curriculum, SEND, equality and assessment practice

The English subject leader

- maintains a coherent progression and agreed models through Nelson Handwriting
- supports staff subject knowledge and induction
- monitors teaching, pupils' work and pupil voice
- evaluates the impact of provision and reports priorities to leaders
- reviews resources and the policy in response to evidence and curriculum change

Teachers

- teach handwriting explicitly and model the agreed style
- establish suitable physical conditions and identify handedness
- assess progress, give precise feedback and arrange timely support
- apply presentation expectations consistently across the curriculum
- record and implement reasonable adjustments and liaise with families and the SENCO

Teaching assistants

- use the agreed terminology, models and prompts
- reinforce the teacher's focus without creating dependence
- observe and report difficulties with control, comfort, formation or transfer
- support intervention as planned and record progress succinctly

Pupils

- engage with teaching and practise carefully
- use agreed posture, positioning and equipment as far as they are able
- respond to feedback and take increasing responsibility for legibility and presentation
- tell an adult if writing causes pain or unusual fatigue

Parents and carers

Families are encouraged to support brief, positive practice using the school's agreed formation guidance, to avoid teaching conflicting joins or lead-in strokes, and to share concerns about pain, fatigue, vision or motor development. The school will provide examples or guidance where home practice is recommended.

14. Resources and professional development

Classrooms have access to the relevant Nelson Handwriting materials, suitable writing tools, visual models and appropriate adaptations. Staff receive induction into the school's approach. Professional development is provided when monitoring identifies inconsistency or when curriculum and assessment expectations change. Staff delivering targeted support are trained in the specific programme or approach they use.

15. Monitoring and evaluation

The English subject leader and senior leaders monitor implementation through a proportionate combination of planning review, learning walks, observation of modelling and pupil posture, work scrutiny across subjects, discussion with pupils and staff, and

analysis of progress for groups. Monitoring asks whether teaching is consistent, whether pupils transfer learning independently, whether adaptations improve access, and whether intervention has measurable impact.

Findings inform feedback, staff development, resource decisions and the school improvement cycle. Monitoring is developmental and does not judge handwriting solely by appearance; comfort, efficiency, fluency, legibility and independence are considered together.

Appendix A: Non-negotiable classroom checklist

- ☐ The handwriting model and vocabulary match the agreed Nelson progression.
- ☐ New learning is explicitly modelled, practised and applied.
- ☐ Adults check seating, posture, paper position, grip and handedness.
- ☐ Pupils have appropriate, well maintained equipment and sufficient space.
- ☐ Practice is short, purposeful and followed by precise feedback.
- ☐ Letter formation is secure before joining is accelerated.
- ☐ Handwriting expectations are reinforced across subjects without obstructing curriculum learning.
- ☐ Adaptations are available and their impact is reviewed.
- ☐ Pain, marked fatigue or persistent difficulty is investigated rather than treated as poor effort.
- ☐ Adults model clear, legible handwriting.

Appendix B: Indicative assessment record

Aspect	Secure	Developing	Priority / adjustment
Posture, position and grip			
Letter and numeral formation			
Orientation and starting points			
Size and proportion			
Placement on the line			
Letter and word spacing			
Joins, where appropriate			
Legibility			
Fluency, speed and stamina			
Transfer across subjects			

Suggested review note: Identify one or two priorities only; record the strategy or adjustment, success measure and review date.

Appendix C: Key reference documents

- Department for Education: Statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- Department for Education: National Curriculum in England - English programmes of study.
- Department for Education and Department of Health: SEND Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years.
- Equality Act 2010 and associated guidance for schools.
- Nelson Handwriting: current school materials and progression guidance.
- St Mary's Catholic Primary School: Curriculum, Marking and Feedback, SEND, Accessibility and Equality policies.

Policy approval

Role	Name	Signature	Date
Headteacher	Mr D O'Connor		
Chair of Governors			



St Mary's Letter Formation Scripts

a  All around the apple down draw in the hook	b  Down the bat and hook right over the ball	c  Curl around the caterpillar	d  Around the bottom up the tall neck and down to the feet	e  Chop off the top and scoop out the egg
f  Hook over the flower down and hook the roots. Draw in the leaves	g  Around the goat's face and down hook under his chin	h  Down the horse's neck to its feet and back over its body	i  Top to toes and dot her head	j  Down into the jar and hook the jam. Dot the lid
k  Down the kangaroo to his feet, come up and hook right to make a pouch, down to his feet.	l  Down the long leg	m  Down, up and over the mountain. Back up and over the mountain again.	n  Down the post and back up to hook over the net	o  All around the orange
p  Down the princess plait, back up and hook right over and round her face	q  Hook left over the queen's face round to her crown, down and give her a swish	r  Down the robot and back up to hook over his arms	s  Slither down the snake	t  Down the tree and across the branch.
u  Down, hook under the umbrella, up to the top and down again and flick	v  Down the vase up the vase	w  Down the wave, up the wave, down the wave and up the wave.	x  Down across the track and across the track the other way	y  Down hook under the yacht and down draw in the anchor
z  zig to the right, zag, zig				