



Dear Reception Families

Successful handwriting depends upon secure motor control and hand-eye co-ordination. For some children this is very natural, to others it is not natural at all. We therefore provide opportunities for all children to succeed in handwriting, by addressing the skills at a variety of physical levels, including: physical control through large-scale movement, manipulative skills and fine motor control and hand-eye co-ordination.

To develop handwriting skills at the beginning of the year we use a program called **Write Dance**. Through this, the children practise the movements that they use when forming letters on a larger scale, encouraging their gross motor control. The children then have the opportunity to use these movements/patterns during fine motor activities.

Warming Up:

We use a software program called **Penpals** to support the children in further developing their readiness to pick up a pencil and write. We do this by undertaking a gross motor and fine motor warm up. Essentially the warm ups focus the children upon the different muscles they will be using whilst sitting at a table and writing. For example, a short exercise that focuses upon using the shoulder and arm muscles, as well as wrist and hand movements, will help towards establishing the correct posture and pencil grip needed to write effectively. Young children learn particularly quickly when there is an activity involved!

Introducing Letter Formation:

Having spent the first part of the Autumn term exploring handwriting patterns through multi-sensory activities (e.g. sand, chalk, paint, shaving foam, rice), we then introduce each letter of the alphabet in families. This is so that the children are better able to see how a number of letters are similarly orientated and formed. There are four families of letters and these are referred to as the 'curly caterpillars', 'zig zag monsters', 'long ladders' and 'one-armed robots'. This is illustrated below. The children's enthusiasm for learning is high and this provides a meaningful start for them.

Long ladders: l/t/i/u/j/y

One-armed robots: r/n/m/h/b/p/k

Curly caterpillars: c/o/a/d/g/q/e/f/s

Zig zag monsters: z/x/v/w

The letters 'o', 'v' and 'w' also have a 'lead out' or 'bridge' to prepare them for joining.

As the children see this letter formation being modelled, they are encouraged to practise it in the air as big as they can, with their magic fingers, and then repeat it again, this time smaller on their hand or leg. Doing this for each letter of the alphabet, the children are using body movements, ears, eyes and speech to help them to remember. This multi-sensory approach is a very effective way of learning, as well as being fun for the children. Saying how each letter is correctly formed out loud is also another way in which the children can gain greater confidence and independence.

After introducing each of the letters through multi-sensory activities, we begin the cycle again, this time focusing on only two letters a week. The children have the opportunity to form each in a multi-sensory way, then repeat the same letter on the following day in their handwriting book. The result should be that the children become more competent writers much sooner and understand that, by forming letters correctly, it is easier for other people to read their writing too.

As you will appreciate, there are a lot of skills that need to be embedded before a child actually begins the process of forming letters and writing. Bearing this in mind, we are encouraging many of the children to continue to mark-make and write for a range of purposes (labels, captions, signs etc) so that it can be displayed within the learning environment, kept safely in their Writing Book and shared with you at home.

We are pleased that so many of the children are keen to practise writing their name. Please can you support us at school by continuing to encourage the correct letter formation.

We hope that you found this information useful, but if there is anything that we haven't answered, please come and see us.

Happy writing!
The Reception Team

