

Overview and Rationale of the SLN Handwriting Scheme

Rationale for a Developmental, Staged Handwriting Scheme

Handwriting is a core component of English. The DfE states that “*writing fluently refers to how smoothly and quickly a pupil can write down their thoughts in words*” and that pupils need transcription skills that are “*sufficiently fluent and effortless*” to meet the demands of the curriculum. Our scheme responds directly to this need with a clear, developmental pathway that prioritises early readiness and long-term fluency.

Why a Staged, Not Aged, Approach?

The research is unequivocal: physical readiness is the foundation of handwriting success. Occupational therapy and motor-development studies show that fine motor control builds on gross motor strength, stability, and coordination. Children who lack core strength or shoulder stability often struggle not because they “can’t write”, but because they do not yet have the physical base they need.

Our first two stages acknowledge this essential progression, alongside following of instructions and key visual perception skills by teaching:

- Gross and fine motor development
- Visual perception and spatial awareness
- Scissor skills and bilateral coordination
- Following instructions and building motor memory

Systematic Teaching of Letter Families

Once motor, visual perception and instructional foundations are secure, pupils move into clearly sequenced individual letter formations in clear **letter families**, reflecting DfE guidance that handwriting must be taught “*explicitly, precisely, regularly and cumulatively*”. Once individual letter formations are secure, the pupils are taught how to join in a clear, systematic way. Our scheme embeds high frequency and common exception words grouped by letter family, ensuring immediate application and securing automaticity - a key component of reducing cognitive load and freeing working memory for composition.

Developing Purposeful, Fluent Writers

Once pupils have secured good letter formation and fluent joins, the later stages explicitly teach:

- Choosing an appropriate **handwriting style** for purpose
- Developing and controlling **slant**, spacing and size
- Selecting the most effective **writing implement**
- Building **fluency without losing legibility**

This reflects the DfE emphasis on quality over quantity and on skilled writers who can write efficiently and clearly. Our approach supports children in moving from controlled, effortful writing to the fluent, proactive control typical of skilled writers.

To support this, as well as the clear assessment points and tracking at the end of each stage, pupils use a **child-friendly legibility scale** and **words-per-minute fluency checks**, providing robust and transparent assessment.

Easy to Use, Highly Structured, Fully Resourced

Each stage includes:

- Daily lesson plans and full resources
- Ready-made PPTs
- Clear assessment points and tracking
- Additional near point copying resources for those who require it
- Built-in progression guidance

This ensures teachers have everything they need for consistent, high-quality provision, while the staged structure guarantees every child progresses at an appropriate pace - not held back, not rushed on.

What Makes This Scheme Stand Out

- **Fully developmental:** grounded in motor-skill research and aligned with DfE expectations for sequenced, cumulative instruction
- **Easy to implement:** complete daily lessons, clear assessment, no extra planning
- **High impact:** strong focus on fluency, legibility and purposeful writing
- **Evidence informed:** incorporates findings from the National Handwriting Association and current DfE Writing Framework guidance
- **Flexible:** once individual letter formation had been taught, schools can make individual decisions about following a cursive or a break letters pathway. Options are given for versions of k. Timings of the sessions can also be delivered in a flexible way.

In short, this handwriting scheme is practical, research-aligned and easy to use - giving schools a complete, coherent pathway from early physical readiness to confident, fluent, legible writers.

Stage by Stage Overview

Please note: Suggested timetabling for Stages 1-5 is a shorter, daily input. In stages 6-8 the suggested timing is a slightly longer input (as more investigative) three times a week. The sessions are flexible and can be broken down into smaller parts over a longer period if needed. If children are not ready to move onto the next stage, then all, or elements of the previous stage, can be repeated. An integral part of every stage is live modelling by the teacher, and a visualiser is an essential piece of equipment that is required to deliver the quality first teaching.

Please also see our Extra Support for Handwriting Advice Sheet.

Stage One Planning

Gross and fine motor focus, alongside the ability to follow instructions and use visual skills.

Covered in this stage: Activities that require the children to show they can follow simple instructions. Children will be asked to take part in activities to develop gross and fine motor skills, with an extra focus on using a pincer grip and crossing the midline of the body.

This is a **four-week block** that is very practical and will require additional resources such as skipping ropes and sequins. All the resources that are needed for each week are listed in the final column of the planning document for this stage.

By the end of this stage, children can be assessed using the stage one assessment points.

Stage Two Planning

Gross and fine motor focus, alongside pencil, scissor and visual perception skills and the following of instructions.

Covered in this stage:

- Following instructions
- Gross motor skills, with a particular focus on crossing the mid-line of the body
- Fine motor skills, with a particular focus on using a pincer grip
- Visual perception skills
- Scissor skills, including explicit teaching and modelling of how to hold scissors correctly
- Pencil grip, developing a tripod pencil grip
- Pre-writing skills, practising key shapes and patterns on paper

This is an **eight-week block** that is very practical and will require additional resources such as play dough and peg boards. In addition, there are several scissor and visual perception skills PDF sheets, provided in the resources folder of stage two. All the resources that are needed for each week are listed in the final column of the planning document for this stage.

By the end of this stage children can be assessed using the stage two assessment points.

Stage Three Planning

The continued development of gross and fine motor skills is vital. In this stage and stage four, this is continued through the use of video-based warmups using dough, finger warmups, pencil warmups and crossing the midline warmups. It is advisable that each child has their own small pot of dough for the dough-based ones. These are widely and cheaply available to purchase or could be home made.

Letter formation in letter families

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 3:** introducing the **straight down letter family** of i, l, t, j, k*, u and y
- **Block 2 Weeks 4 – 8:** introducing the **back and around letter family** of c, o, a, d, g, q, e, s, f and applying both these and the straight down letters into spelling words
- **Block 3 Weeks 9 – 15:** introducing the **bounce back up letter family** of r, n, m, h, b, p and k* and revising all three letter families by combining them to form spelling words

- **Block 4 Weeks 16 – 18:** introducing the **zigzag letter family** of v, w, x and z and revising all four letter families by combining them to form spelling words
- **Block 5 Weeks 19 – 24:** introducing the **capital letters** that start with a down motion: B, D, E, F, H, I, J, K, L, M, N, P, R, T and U. Followed by introducing the capital letters that start with a back and around motion: C, G, O, Q and S. Followed by introducing the capital letters that use a diagonal motion: A, V, W, X, Y and Z. Combining the capital letters with lower case letters to form the days of the week
- **Block 6 Weeks 25 – 28:** introducing how to **form numerals**, the back and around numerals of 0, 8 and 9, the down numerals of 1 and 5, the forward and around numerals of 2 and 3 and the diagonal numerals of 4, 6 and 7. Recapping all and then some time on **common errors** across all formations in the stage.

By the end of this stage, children can be assessed using the stage three assessment points.

*Schools that wish to teach *k* as an ‘in and out’ down letter will teach it in Block 1; schools that wish to use a cursive, bounce back up *k* will teach it in Block 3.

Stage Four Planning

The continued development of gross and fine motor skills is vital. In this stage, this is continued through the use of video-based warmups using dough, finger warmups, pencil warmups and crossing the mid-line warmups. It is advisable that each child has their own small pot of dough for the dough-based ones. These are widely and cheaply available to purchase or could be home made.

Revision of letter formation and lead outs

Please note: In this stage, you must make a decision about whether you will continue to teach the handwriting sequence with break letters (listed below) or as fully cursive. You will then continue to follow either the cursive or break letter pathway going forward. Following on from the choice made in stage three, options are also given for schools that wish to teach *k* as an ‘in and out’ down letter and schools that wish to use a cursive, bounce back up *k*.

The break letters are: *b, p, g, j, q, y, z, x, s*

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 7:** revision of all letter families, capital letters and numerals
- **Block 2 Weeks 8 – 12:** introducing the letters that **lead out from the bottom**
- **Block 3 Weeks 13 – 15:** introducing the **letters that lead out from the top** and a revision week of review and practice using spelling words

By the end of this block, children can be assessed using the stage four assessment points for moving on to the next stage, as shared individually within the stage four resources and on the whole scheme spreadsheet overview.

Stage Five Planning

The letter joins

Please note: There continues to be a choice between the two paths to follow at this stage; one which shares how to join with the use of break letters: *b, p, g, j, q, y, z, x, s* and one which is fully cursive, with no break letters.

Option 1: Letter Joins – with break letters: *b, p, g, j, q, y, z, x, s*

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 4:** revision of capital letters, numerals and lead outs
- **Block 2 Weeks 5 – 10:** introducing the diagonal join
- **Block 3 Weeks 11 – 14:** introducing the horizontal join and break letter practice using spelling words
- **Block 4 Weeks 15 – 22:** further diagonal and horizontal joins
- **Block 5 Weeks 23 – 31:** break letter practice using spelling words and further diagonal and horizontal joins

Option 2: Letter Joins – fully cursive, without break letters

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 4:** revision of capital letters, numerals and lead outs
- **Block 2 Weeks 5 – 10:** introducing the diagonal join
- **Block 3 Weeks 11 – 13:** introducing the horizontal join
- **Block 4 Weeks 14 – 22:** further horizontal and diagonal joins
- **Block 5 Weeks 23 – 31:** further and more challenging diagonal and horizontal joins

By the end of this block, children can be assessed using the stage five assessment points for moving on to the next stage, as shared individually within the stage five resources and on the whole scheme spreadsheet overview.

Stage Six Planning

Handwriting Fluency through spelling patterns

Please note: Now that all letter formations and joins have been taught, this stage is suggested to be taught as three sessions per week, but this is entirely flexible and up to the individual school how they may wish to timetable it. As with any teaching, some sessions may need revisiting or more practice. By this stage, pupils should be able to join two or more letters and know which letters do not join, according to the path the school has followed and any individual decisions in a school's policy. The focus of this stage is on building fluency in joining and spelling rules and words have been taken from the Year 3/4 Appendix 1 Spelling guidance from the National Curriculum to provide that practice. As the focus is on the handwriting, if you are approaching this stage at an earlier or later National Curriculum year, then it can be seen as a chance to pre-teach or revise those spelling aspects.

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 5:** revision of capital letters, numerals building handwriting fluency through suffix work
- **Block 2 Weeks 6 – 11:** building handwriting fluency through prefix and spelling word work
- **Block 3 Weeks 12 – 17:** further handwriting fluency practice through suffix, prefix and spelling word work
- **Block 4 Weeks 18 – 25:** further handwriting fluency through homophones, and spelling exception word work
- **Block 5 Weeks 26 – 31:** further handwriting fluency through spelling rules, harder suffixes and prefixes and spelling word work

By the end of this block, children can be assessed using the stage six assessment points for moving on to the next stage, as shared individually within the stage six resources and on the whole scheme spreadsheet overview.

Stage Seven Planning

Writing fluently and legibly and exploring handwriting application and implement choice in a range of tasks.

Please note: Children should now be able to form and join letters consistently in terms of height, size and shape. This stage is all about increasing fluency, legibility, speed and stamina. It also explicitly teaches the children to understand the different types of handwriting that we might choose to apply to suit a specific purpose. The planning is based on two 20-minute sessions a week with an optional third session incorporating spelling words taken from the Year 5/6 Appendix 1 spelling guidance from the National Curriculum. This stage is about integrating accuracy, fluency, stamina and speed. These words, although a way to practise spelling, have not been chosen or chunked according to spelling patterns but have been chosen and chunked by their different motor and morphological patterns.

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 6:** introducing positive feedback. Introducing choosing a style and implement to suit a task. Introducing slant in handwriting and practising presentation
- **Block 2 Weeks 7 – 12:** exploring different forms of note taking, including the use of symbols, bullet points, mind maps and headings
- **Block 3 Weeks 13 – 18:** exploring handwriting for a purpose (functional handwriting) and knowing when, and why, to apply different styles
- **Block 4 Weeks 19– 24:** exploring creative lettering and its uses, including line weight and emphasis
- **Block 5 Weeks 25 – 30:** exploring presentation styles, consistency across the page and increasing speed and stamina without losing handwriting quality

By the end of this block, children can be assessed using the stage seven assessment points for moving on to the next stage, as shared individually within the stage seven resources and on the whole scheme spreadsheet overview.

Stage Eight Planning

Writing fluently and consistently

The main purpose of this final stage is for children to develop fluent, consistent handwriting that remains legible as speed and length increase, using structured practice, feedback and reflection.

Things to note:

- Speed is measured, not chased
- Legibility remains the key requirement
- Improvement comes through review and rewriting
- Pupils learn to diagnose and fix handwriting issues

Words per minute (WPM): Late Primary, ages 10 -12: 10–12 WPM

Teachers should:

- record WPM occasionally
- compare pupils to their own previous performance
- never criticise pupils for being slower if legibility is strong

Covered in this stage:

- **Block 1 Weeks 1 – 6:** copying - focus on consistency of letter size and spacing, write longer passages, introducing words per minute tracking, and legibility scale (pupil friendly version). Includes teacher modelling, repetition, troubleshooting poor examples, self and peer assessment.

Block 2 Weeks 7 – 12: listening - focus on dictation and maintaining control, consistency without a visual model. Gradually increasing sentence length. Self-assess against legibility score, troubleshooting handwriting issues when writing at speed, discussing differences between copying and dictation.

Block 3 Weeks 13 – 18: independent - focus on composition, handwriting while thinking, sustaining fluency without copying. Led by teacher modelling – writing while thinking aloud. Continuing with WPM recording and legibility scale.

Assessment folder

In the assessment folder, you will find:

- Stage by stage individual assessments, including individual pupil sheets where needed
- All stages overview on one tracking sheet
- An individual tracking sheet for letter formation
- A pupil-friendly legibility scale
- A words per minute advice sheet (in additional documents)

Additional Resources

A set of display posters and tabletop aids on:

An overview of the 4Ps of handwriting: posture, position, pencil grip and pressure

Alphabet posters of all the lower case letters and capital letters in letter families

Numeral formation posters with rhymes

Paper position for left and right-handed writers

Pencil pressure

Placement on the line

Pencil grip

Overview of line placement, sizing, spacing, ascenders, descenders and capital letters both in poster format and individual self-assessment sheet (tick if seen three times)

Perfect posture

Nip, flip and grip to pick up a pencil (also in video form)

Additional Documents

A handwriting policy based on this scheme

Left-handed advice sheet

Quality First Teaching and SEND Advice and Next Steps

Words per minute guidance sheet

Parent guidance sheet PDF and PPT