

Spelling & Handwriting Provision: A Checklist



The Writing For Pleasure Centre

- Promoting research-informed writing teaching

Writing is language on paper. More than 85% of people in the world can write, and writing is intimately connected to every aspect of our lives. Children who fail to write well miss out on many aspects of being a fully-fledged member of our society and find themselves at a severe disadvantage. Poor writing skills can limit children's academic, occupational, cultural, civic and personal ambitions.

At present, too many children are leaving school feeling the effects of inadequate writing skills. Ofsted and the DfE have repeatedly acknowledged that progress and attainment in writing has been consistently poor in England.

In a bid to turn the tide on writing underachievement, educators have rightly been interested in developing children's **writing fluency**. This typically means developing children's oral language, spelling, handwriting and sentence-level skills so that they can write freely and happily. This is sensible because we know that children who don't internalise these 'basic' skills of writing early into their educational journey can go on to underperform and even experience school failure. In contrast, when these skills are well established, children have the cognitive space to focus on other aspects of writing and being a writer.

To help schools combat writing underachievement, this checklist will help you audit your school's spelling and handwriting provision against evidence-based research recommendations.

Spelling

*Please red, amber or green the following statements

Is 60-75 minutes devoted to spelling instruction and practice each week? Is this instruction spread across the week? (E.g. an average of 10-15 minutes a day) [LINK]	
Is this instruction in addition to <i>specific</i> reading <i>and</i> writing lessons?	
In the EYFS-KS1 are children receiving explicit phonics instruction?	
In the EYFS-KS1 are children regularly receiving encoding strategy instruction in writing lessons? [LINK]	
In the summer term of EYFS onwards to the end of KS2 are children receiving proof-reading instruction specifically on how to check their spellings? [LINK]	
Are children explicitly taught to write 'temporary spellings' as they are drafting? Are children reassured that they will be given adequate proof-reading time later into a writing project to attend to these spellings? [LINK]	
Are common words on display and are they large enough that the child sat furthest away can read them easily?	
In proof-reading sessions, do teachers celebrate the informed ways children have tried to spell words before showing them how to spell them conventionally? [LINK]	
For children who need it, are they receiving additional instruction and practice through intervention? [LINK]	
Do your children get plenty of extended opportunities to read?	
Do your children get plenty of extended opportunities to write?	

Your spelling approach/scheme

For schools in England, does your approach focus on covering what is statutorily required? [LINK]	
In the EYFS, does your spelling approach develop children's phonological knowledge? Put simply, how to write the sounds they hear in words. [LINK]	
In KS1-KS2, does your spelling approach develop children's phonological, orthographic and morphological knowledge? Put simply, does your instruction include learning: (1) how to write the sounds they hear in words, (2) spelling patterns and rules, (3) the meaning of prefixes, suffixes and root words? [LINK]	
Does the approach include <i>test-study-test</i> by administering pre-tests, in-school study activities, and post-tests? [LINK] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pretests: Administered before instruction begins. The teacher gives a definition of the word, uses it in a sentence, asks children to say the word, asks children to break it up into syllables, children write the word, children see the word, they make any corrections to their attempt. This is repeated for all words. Children spend the week focusing on the words they misspelt. - Practice tests: These informal (often peer administered) tests are undertaken throughout the week to reinforce spelling skills and promote retention. Practice tests help students consolidate their learning and identify areas that require further practice. - Posttests: Administered only after instruction and study practice is complete. Posttests can test children on the same spellings or assess children's ability to apply their knowledge of specific patterns to new words. 	
Does the approach include [LINK] : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Word sorting? <i>The teacher picks words that show different sounds or spelling patterns. Students sort words based on these patterns. Children explain why words belong to certain groups. In England, these would be based on what is statutorily required [LINK].</i> - Noticing the syllables? <i>Modelling to children how to break spellings down into syllable chunks?</i> - Oral spelling or exaggerated pronunciation? <i>Vocalising each letter of the word or exaggerating the pronunciation of parts of a word to emphasise the phonetic elements of the word.</i> 	

- Tracing and visualisation activities?
Pronouncing a word before tracing the letters in the word with their eyes closed. While doing this, students say the letters aloud. Next, they write the words down, checking if their spelling is correct, and correcting it if it's wrong. Teachers teach students to use this strategy independently through explicit instruction and supervise them as they practise. A poster on the wall guides students through these steps.

- Individual and peer study?
Children engage in "look-copy-cover-write-compare-correct" study. Throughout the week, children take turns in tutoring and testing each other.

- Old way / New way posters
Celebrating the informed ways children have tried to spell words and next to it the conventional spelling. This includes contrasting and comparing the two. Celebrating what's the same - noticing what makes them different.

Are spelling and word mats presented as lists or in columns?

Handwriting

**Please red, amber or green the following statements*

Does your school have a handwriting policy? [LINK]	
Is there a consistent script taught across the school?	
Does your phonics teaching include letter formation instruction and practice?	
From Year One to Year Five, are children provided with daily instruction and practice? (on average 10-20 minutes a day) <i>For example, 5 minutes of instruction and 5-15 minutes of practice</i>	
Is this instruction in addition to <i>specific</i> reading <i>and</i> writing lessons?	
Do teachers teach children to hold their pencil using the tripod grip? <i>Do they ensure that children are ultimately developing a grip that is comfortable and efficient for them?</i>	
Teachers focus on legibility, speed, stamina, and happiness of the child - not adherence to a particular style.	
Do teachers provide additional handwriting instruction and feedback to pupils during publishing sessions?	
Is additional instruction/intervention provided for children who need it?	
Do your children get plenty of extended opportunities to write?	
Children who already write legibly, fluently and happily in joined-up handwriting (or a mixture of joined and manuscript) are invited to work on their personal writing projects during handwriting lessons [LINK]	

Your handwriting approach/scheme

Do EYFS-KS1 teachers model how upper and lower-case letters are formed? <i>Is the instructional focus on teaching lower-case letters?</i>	
Do teachers in KS2 model how letters can join?	
Do teachers describe how letters are similar to or different from other letters? (see next page)	
Do teachers use arrows as a guide for letter formation?	
Does your approach include opportunities for visualisation, tracing, copying and writing from memory?	
Are children taught and then practise a small number of letters together at the same time? <i>For example, they practise writing "x k z" multiple times</i>	
Does the approach include activities which ask children to write at speed? <i>For example, over a number of sessions, children are asked to write a sentence as many times as they can containing key letters that have been learnt. Children try to write three more letters compared to their previous score each day.</i>	
Teachers give individualised feedback and instruction to children while they practise. <i>For example, do they make corrections using a highlighter and ask children to trace over their highlights? Do they give feedback to the children who need it most?</i>	
Are children asked to self-monitor and evaluate their attempts? <i>For example, are they asked to circle their best attempts?</i>	
Is special emphasis placed on teaching difficult letters, such as <i>a, j, k, n, q, u</i> and <i>z</i> ?	

Handwriting

A recommended order of teaching:

- Unit 1 - l, i, t
- Unit 2 - o, e, a
- Unit 3 - n, s, r
- Unit 4 - p, h, f
- Unit 5 - c, d, g
- Unit 6 - b, m, u
- Unit 7 - v, w, y
- Unit 8 - x, k, z
- Unit 9 - j and q
- Unit 10 - a, j, k,
- Unit 11 - n, q, u and z
- Unit 12 - based on teacher assessment

Each unit should be taught three times.

A recommended handwriting lesson format:

Each handwriting lesson consists of four activities:

1. Alphabet warm-up (2 minutes)

Name each letter and understand its sequence in the alphabet.

2. Handwriting practice (6 minutes)

In the first lesson of a new unit:

1. Teacher models and describes how to form each letter using arrows to show the order and direction of strokes.
2. Students imitate the teacher by tracing each letter in the air and describing the formation.
3. Discuss similarities and differences between the letters.
4. Students trace the letters with numbered arrows, then trace without arrows, write the letters with outlines, and finally write them on regular-lined paper. Alternatively, children go straight to writing them on regular-lined paper.
5. Circle their best-written letters.

In the second and third lesson:

The teacher doesn't model and students don't imitate. Instead:

1. Students trace each target letter with a pencil and then practise writing it on regular-lined paper, circling their best-written letters. Alternatively, children go straight to writing them on regular-lined paper.
2. Additional practice involves copying words containing the target letters.
 - a. For lesson two, children copy five words.
 - b. In lesson three, children copy "hinky-pinkys". Hinky-pinkys are rhyming word pairs which contain the target letters.
3. In the evaluation stage, students circle their best-formed word. Teachers use a highlighter to correct miscues made by the students. For example, if a child forgets to cross a 't', the teacher will add the cross using the highlighter, and the student will correct it by tracing the highlighter mark with their pencil.

3. Alphabet rockets (5 minutes)

In the first lesson of each unit, students are given a sentence to copy. This sentence will contain many examples of the letters they are learning in that unit. For example, in the first unit, they might copy a sentence like: *Little kids like to get letters.*

The goal is for students to copy the sentence as quickly as they can - without making mistakes. They are given three minutes. Afterwards, the students count how many letters they copied and note it on their paper. This helps children track their progress in writing fluency over the three lessons.

During the second lesson of a unit, students review how many letters they had written in the previous lesson. Then, the students are encouraged to try and **write three more letters** than they did before. This gradual increase aims to improve their fluency without sacrificing legibility, as writing *too fast* can sometimes make handwriting harder to read.

4. Alphabet fun (2 minutes)

To end, if you'd like, children can write one of the target letters in a unique way, like making it extra long and tall or short and fat. They can also incorporate the letter into a picture, for example, turning the letter "i" into a butterfly or "s" into a snake.

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