Writing Policy

Written: Autumn Term 2021

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1. Introduction

Our approach to writing has been developed in response to continuous professional development for our subject leaders which as provided the subject leaders with a secure understanding of important elements of being successful when teaching writing. The subject leaders have undergone training from a wide range of professionals including Talk for Writing trainers and Grammarsaurus staff. In addition to that, the subject leaders have used core research on the important of transcription, dictation and composition to create a bespoke writing approach.

Talk for Writing

At Firs, we have previously be trained by Talk for Writing staff. We have now developed our own approach to teaching writing, identifying from monitoring what works successfully in our school and enables our children to make the best progress. We have chosen to use **some** elements of Talk for Writing in our teaching sequence.

Talk for Writing supports children to explore, through talk and guided practice, the thinking and creative processes involved in being a writer. It allows opportunities for teacher talk, supported pupil talk and independent pupil talk. Talk for Writing is an approach that goes beyond the development of children's general speaking and listening skills – it allows children to explore the processes involved in being a writer, and extends oral rehearsal so that it becomes a draft for their written pieces. The approach supports the children to move from talk into writing.

Transcription, Dictation and Composition

Having a good understanding of transition, dictation and composition is essential for children to make good progress in writing. It also ensures that the writing curriculum takes into account children's working memory: children must be able to form letters at speed and spell words without taking up space in the memory to ensure they can focus on their ideas as a writer. We there recognise that pupils need to develop accuracy and fluency in writing. To achieve this pupils need:

- Knowledge for transcription and composition, including vocabulary
- Time to practice with models, scaffolds and the opportunity to build fluency with repeated practise
- Prior knowledge to be secure so that they can build complexity incrementally.

It is therefore imperative that the writing curriculum is planned to provide opportunities to develop children in all 3 areas of writing.

Grammarsaurus Place Value of Punctuation and Grammar

This unit of work recognises that for children to be able to become the best writers possible, that they must understand the structure of sentences and the role of different word classes. They recognise that children must understand the 'place value' of grammar exactly as we would require them to in maths, before moving on to writing composition. Through carefully structured lessons, the correct vocabulary and accurate subject knowledge from staff, at the start of the year, children learn this through 20 objectives before completing composition writing tasks.

2. Aims

By the end of Key Stage 2 we aim for a child to be able to:

- Write with confidence, fluency and understanding, orchestrating a range of independent strategies to self-monitor and correct.
- Have an interest in words and their meanings, developing a growing vocabulary in spoken and written forms.
- Understand a range of text types and genres and to be able to write in a variety of styles and forms appropriate to the situation.
- Develop the powers of imagination, inventiveness and critical awareness.
- Write for a least an hour a day – this could be in English or topic work, or a combination of the two

3. Organisation of Writing and Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage

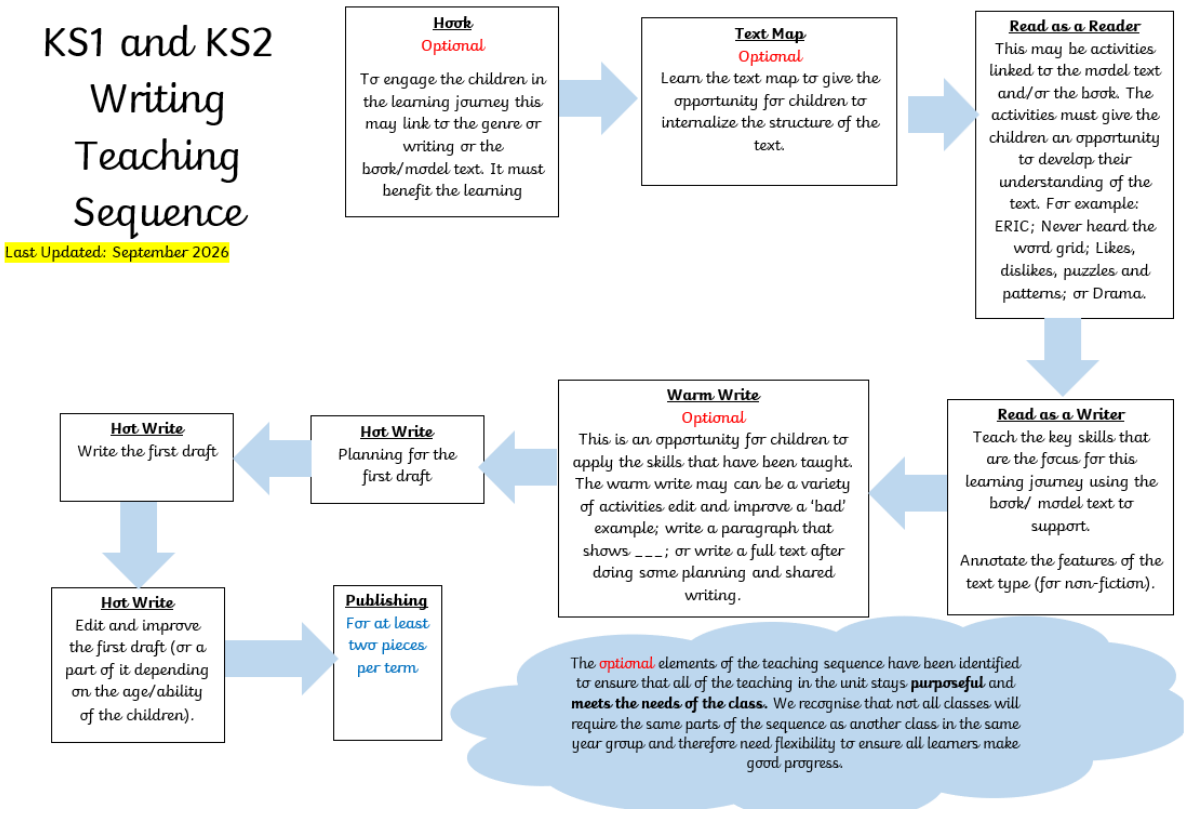
In the Early Years, children are encouraged to attempt their own emergent writing and their efforts are valued and praised. As their phonic knowledge increases, this will be reflected in their writing. At the same time, their knowledge of key words is supported through reading and writing activities, including shared reading and writing. A wide variety of opportunities are provided for children to engage in writing activities. Amongst these are:

- Shared writing
- Role-play (e.g. an office or restaurant)
- Labels
- Recipes
- Lists
- Making books
- Writing letters
- Menus

Through engaging in these activities, children become aware that writing is used for a range of purposes. They distinguish it from drawing, and learn the left to right convention of writing in English. A variety of resources are used to encourage the development of fine motor control which is essential for good handwriting. These include manipulating play dough, cutting, threading and tracing. Fine motor skills are also a focus in motor skills groups targeted at specific children. Gross motor skills are also developed through these groups (as well as in PE), as upper body strength is recognised as being vital to good fine motor skills.

In the Early Years, there is an emphasis on providing children with the vocabulary and understanding of story structures through oral rehearsal of simple tales. This enables children to tell their own stories orally and then, as their phonics skills develop, begin to record them with support or independently once they are developmentally ready.

4. Organisation of Writing and Planning in Key Stage One and Two



5. Peer/Self-Assessment

We encourage our learners to use peer and self-assessment orally across the curriculum, and this may be recorded where appropriate, in line with the curriculum recommendations.

6. Support in writing

English Lessons

Children should be given, where possible/appropriate, differing levels of prompts. These consist of general prompts for the Greater Depth, more directed questions for the middle attaining, sentence starters and questions for the children with specific learning needs and questions with simplified language and communicate in print for new arrivals or children with SEND needs.

During the planning and writing of the independent stage, the scaffolding should be removed. No question prompts or sentence starters should be used as this piece is a reflection of what the children can produce independently.

Topic Lessons

As in English lessons, any writing activities in topic should also be supported by differing levels of prompts (unless they are an assessed independent piece for Y2 or Y6 moderation).

At times it may be appropriate for new arrivals to have a simpler task in order to express their understanding in different subject areas.

7. Presentation

Most writing for English should be done in yellow writing books. Although independent pieces of writing linked to topic will be written in green topic books. Children will initially use handwriting line guides in their book. These will be used whilst children are still learning how to form their letters, including the correct sizing and learning how to join

their writing. For most children, they will progress off handwriting lined books by the start of year 2, however children Key Stage 2 may also require books with line guides if they have SEND or if they are New Arrivals with limited school experience. Children must be encouraged to keep these books neat.

Each term a piece of a child's best writing will be added to their purple 'Writing Portfolio'. This helps children to feel proud of their achievements in writing, and their Writing Portfolio follows the child up through the school. Best prices of writing may be copied directly into the portfolio or it can be a photocopied piece.

If a child is not applying what they have learnt in handwriting and not joining letters at the level at which they are capable, they should be helped towards achieving this through encouragement, verbal feedback and/or interventions.

An adult's handwriting must be neat and model what we expect from children. Expectations should be appropriate for the child's ages and development, so if children are not at an age or level of development where joined handwriting is expected, then teachers and other adults in the classroom should model neat, but un-joined handwriting. The English coordinator has developed a handwriting assessment, based on NHS guidance, to support teacher judgement in relation to whether or not children are developmentally able to use joined handwriting.

8. Handwriting

We teach handwriting using the 'Improvement in School through Handwriting and Art' (ISHA—Martin Harvey) handwriting scheme. This is based on the Nelson handwriting scheme. However, we appreciate that many of pupils who start the school (particularly in Key Stage 2) have different prior schooling experiences and may arrive at Firs Primary having already learned to use a different style of cursive writing. **If children are proficient in another handwriting style, we believe it is counterproductive to their progress in writing to change this.**

However, should number formation in another handwriting style potentially disadvantage a student during formal maths assessment, this will be addressed on an individual basis.

Consistency is a key word.
Consistency in terms of the handwriting style and letter shapes being taught
Consistency in terms of how handwriting lessons are taught
Consistency in terms of the way teaching materials and writing tools are used
Consistency in terms of the teaching language which is used

Consistency in terms of all members of staff supporting and believing in this drive for excellence in handwriting at Firs. It has to be seen that this is what ***we*** are doing as a staff. It has to be seen that this is something that is happening in every class. It has to be seen that this is something ***we*** all believe in. The more that teachers give strong messages to pupils, showing they are really passionate about high quality presentation of work, the greater the likelihood of high standards being achieved.

FREQUENCY OF HANDWRITING LESSONS

At the start of every term, here at Firs we drive up standards of presentation. Handwriting has to be taught intensively for a sustained period, if the initiative is to have the required impact.

'Do a little and do it often' is a key phrase. *Doing a little* means lessons of 15/20 minutes. *Doing it often* means doing at least four handwriting lessons per week, using the programme of lessons we provide. From this, a rise in standards will be seen very rapidly, not just in handwriting lessons, but in the way children present their work across the curriculum.

What happens after the above?

At this point the classes would be able to reduce the frequency of lessons; one lesson per fortnight in upper KS2 and one lesson per week in lower KS2 at minimum, but with a big emphasis on applying skills from handwriting lessons in writing tasks of varying length, across the curriculum. The class teacher will decide.

In Y1 and Y2, lessons are able to be reduced to two per week. In Foundation stage, activities are taking place every day to develop gross motor skills, finger strength, fine motor skills and pencil control.

When children return from the longer holidays there needs to be a 'topping up' in order to re-establish good habits and good attitudes which are required for excellent handwriting. After a summer holiday, it is important that strong foundations are laid for the year ahead. Every class should do a handwriting lesson every day for the first three weeks in order to set the standards which are to be maintained throughout the year. Year one classes will need to continue teaching handwriting intensively during the first half of the autumn term. Other classes will be able to scale back on lesson frequency.

After Christmas and Easter holidays, there should be a week where handwriting is taught daily in each class, in order to re-establish high standards (as stated above).

Within the framework above, there should be a degree of flexibility. A teacher who recognises that handwriting standards have slipped in their own class, they have the freedom use their own professional judgement to re-establish high standards by having a week of daily handwriting lessons.

NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

Newcomers need a comprehensive, thorough period of induction to the teaching of handwriting. This will consist of the following:

1. Observing colleagues teach handwriting lessons, followed by paired discussion on teaching strategies modelled and how the lesson was structured.
2. Team teaching with more experienced colleagues, if needed.
3. Meeting with the leaders of the English team, focusing on the principles behind the whole school ethos of good presentation of work.
4. The new member of staff being provided with the *Excellence In Handwriting* booklet and all teaching materials, with clear explanation of how to use them.

In some cases, a whole school inset day refresher may be arranged.

THREE LEVELS OF PRESENTATION FOR CHILDREN

There are occasions when writing tasks or handwritten recording of work in different curriculum areas should be presented beautifully and times where presentation is less important. This is best explained by the three levels of presentation shown below.

1. ***Highest level of presentation***. For example, where the teacher says to the class, *"With the Science investigation we have just finished, we are going to write it up beautifully with written explanations in your finest handwriting, with well constructed tables of results and carefully drawn diagrams. We are going to use plain paper of various sizes and line guides. I want you to feel really proud of your completed work and I want you to make your teacher very proud. I have a big, empty display board waiting for your work." Work in purple books will show this best.*

2. ***Lowest level of presentation.***
   eg. Children are working in small groups with large sheets of sugar paper and marker pens. Teacher says, *" You have two minutes to write a superb sentence about the way the bare tree across the playground is moving in the January breeze."* Children are writing at speed, inserting extra words to improve their sentence and perhaps crossing out. Presentation does not matter at all in this type of task.

3. ***Middle level of presentation.*** This is where children work in exercise books. eg.
Skills work in a literacy lesson; exercises on prefixes, suffixes, comprehension work, how to write extended sentences. There should be clear evidence of the school's handwriting style, with finger spaces and correct joins where they have been taught. With this type of task, the high quality of the top level of presentation should not be expected or demanded, but the lowest level of presentation would be totally unacceptable.

ADULT HANDWRITING

As with the three levels of presentation for children, there are times when adults in Firs must produce their finest handwriting and times when good handwriting matters less.

Top level of handwriting. During handwriting lessons or when producing handwritten labels to go with displays of children's work.

Middle level of handwriting. Handwritten comments in children's exercise books at Firs. These should be neatly written, using the school's handwriting style. If they are written untidily, they can be inaccessible to the children, making the written comment worthless. Badly written comments give children mixed and contradictory messages. Due to the time required to write perhaps thirty handwritten comments, it is unrealistic for these to be written to the ***top level*** standards. The same principles as the middle level of presentation for children's writing should apply here.

Bottom level of handwriting. This is where the quality of adult handwriting does not matter at all. eg. *A guided writing activity.* If a class or group of children are offering adjectives and adverbs in rapid succession to enhance a sentence, it would be counter productive for the adult to write slowly and meticulously in their most beautiful handwriting. Guided writing should be short, sharp and pacey. In this bottom level of handwriting, with crossings out, insertion of extra words and arrows to move sections of language within the sentence, the only criteria should be that the children are able to read what the adult has written.

TRANSFERING SKILLS FROM HANDWRITING LESSONS TO OTHER WRITING TASKS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Staff and children at Firs do not pursue an initiative to achieve excellence in handwriting just so that it looks great in handwriting lessons; this would be teaching skills for the sake of teaching skills and totally worthless. The whole idea is for children to use the handwriting skills they have been taught in order to present work across the curriculum in an attractive way that develops feelings of personal pride.

How to achieve this. The three key words are: *insist motivate expect*

Insist on correct posture and correct sitting position throughout the school day BBC, TNT, six feet two hands, pencil hold.

Insist on correct letter formation and correct letter joins in cross curricular writing
Insist on children producing their very best whenever it is required

Motivate children by giving copious amounts of praise when it is merited in line with the behaviour policy at Firs.
Motivate children by *telling* them exactly what you are looking for.
Motivate children by *showing* them exactly what you are looking for
Motivate children by celebrating their efforts and achievements with displays of their written work, showing it is really valued.

Make it clear to children that what you *expect* from them is their very best at all times.
Make it clear to children that nothing less than their own best is acceptable.

In some classes, we use the same lines for writing tasks in books as the ones used in handwriting lessons. This plays an enormous part in helping children to transfer handwriting skills to written work across the curriculum when they are beginning to learn to write. If the children are well established in letter formation and presentation, the handwriting lines will be normal ruled in books.

CLASSROOM ORGANISATION

- Ensure that all children have good viewing of teacher modelling during handwriting lessons. Children must be either facing the board or sideways on to it. No children should have their backs to the board. *In a Firs classroom, seating arrangements will be organised according to the nature of the task children are engaged in. School furniture is not set in concrete.*

- Children need to have enough desk space when they are writing. Ensure that desks are as uncluttered as possible.

- Take left-handed children into consideration. Where children are sitting in pairs, the left- hander should be sitting to the left. *This ensures that both left and right-handed children have sufficient space to work comfortably.*

- Ensure that there is sufficient light in the classroom.

- Ensure that children's writing is clearly visible in the classroom.

CELEBRATE CELEBRATE CELEBRATE

DISPLAY DISPLAY DISPLAY

Short term displays of children's handwriting practice can be seen around school. These act as a reward, motivation and examples of quality.
Displaying children's written work shows that writing is high priority and really valued by the teacher.

HANDWRITING TOOLS

In order to produce excellent handwriting, children must have good quality tools.

Pencils

- Pencils must always be sharp. *A pencil is not a pencil unless it has a point.*
- Pencils must never be sharpened at both ends. *This is dangerous and also shows complete disrespect for the writing tool.*
- Pencils must not be too small for the child's hand.
- Pencils do not go in children's mouths!

It is good to give children responsibility for keeping their pencils sharp, but adults need to monitor this.

Pens

The pen has to be seen as a very special, delicate tool. The pen has to be seen by pupils as the most important tool they will use in school. The pen has to be seen as very precious. *If the child looks after the pen, the pen will look after the child! P*ositive attitudes to the pen will only come if adults constantly reinforce these positive messages.

The class teacher will decide when a child will use a pen.

DEVELOP A STRONG SENSE OF PRIDE IN HOW WORK IS PRESENTED

Adults across Firs constantly and consistently giving powerful, motivational messages - *'Not a mark on this page apart from straight lines and letters. No creases or curled up corners. No finger marks or ugly crossing out. Be proud of how your work looks. Make me proud of how your work looks.'*

*****Rubbers are not part of handwriting equipment. Foster the mindset of, 'When you make a mistake in handwriting lessons, look at the mistake, learn from the mistake, leave it and carry on'.

ESSENTIAL HABITS FOR DEVELOPING EXCELLENT HANDWRITING

1. **Two hands.** Insist on children always using two hands when writing**.** *One hand to hold the paper and one hand to write with.*

2. **Six feet.** Children must always keep six feet on the floor. *Their own two feet and the chair's four feet.* This means that the child does not kneel or sit cross legged on the chair. Neither do they rock backwards or forwards on the chair.

3. **BBC.** Ensure that children always sit in the BBC position **–** *Bottom Back in Chair.* This means that they never sit with the chair sticking out and their bottom on the front edge of the chair.

4. **TNT.** *Tummy Near Table.* This ensures that the child is sitting with the body close to their work, instead of having to stretch forward to write.

5. **Paper position**. *The paper should be upright when the child is writing or at an angle not greater than 45 degrees.* When children turn their paper to an angle greater than this, it is often because the pencil is being held with the thumb in a position which blocks the child's view of the pencil point.

Good posture and correct seating position are vital components of developing good handwriting. The habits above must *not* be seen just as *good habits for handwriting.* They must be insisted upon in all subject areas, throughout the school day, otherwise their impact is reduced. It has to be seen as the correct way, indeed the only way, rather than what is expected merely in handwriting lessons.
NB: At Firs primary, we do not teach joining the letters g and y to other letters. Although, as mentioned previously, you may see some children joining these if they are already proficient in a handwriting style from a previous educational setting.

9. Assessment and Marking

Pieces of writing must be marked using the agreed symbols to give children continual feedback (see marking policy).

Marking should provide scaffolded comments throughout the writing process, on a daily basis, to enable the child to improve their work. E.g. add an adverb here, use a causal conjunction, change this sentence opener.

We use Arbor and FFT to track a child's progress over time and assess their progress towards their target.

Moderation will take place **termly** within and across Key Stage teams to ensure that assessment judgements are consistent across the school.

All ***appropriate*** identified grammatical and spelling mistakes should be picked up on, depending on the age and developmental stage of the child. These may not be all the spellings/grammatical errors in the piece of writing, as this could feel intimidating for some children, particularly those who are 'New to English' or at an early stage in their writing development.

We believe that the most effective form of assessment for learning results in instant verbal feedback for children. During lessons, teachers and other adults should have an orange pen and point out corrections which children can make on the spot. This is excellent formative feedback and should be accompanied with scaffolded comments to make the children think such as: 'Which word is missing here.' 'What's wrong with

the punctuation here?' 'Can you change that so it makes sense?' 'What's wrong with the tense there?'

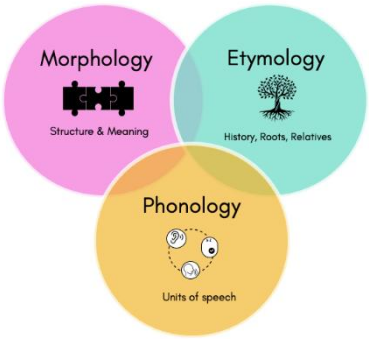
10. Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Grammar is taught contextually and the grammar which is suitable for a genre is identified on progression grid. During modelled writing, use of correct grammar must be continually modelled e.g. 'Let's see if I can use a more powerful verb here.' 'Let's think of an adverb sentence opener to make the writing more interesting.' 'I am using a past tense verb because recounts are generally written in the past tense.'

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar are also taught for those children working above phonics in discreet sessions. These sessions are planned from the termly assessments to determine their starting point. Lessons will be planned from this information in order to meet the children's needs.

As our children have varied starting points throughout the year within their SPaG learning, a set scheme would not be best suited to our school. Our SPaG teaching is based on an AFL approach to ensure our children make quicker progress in their learning from their individual starting points.

The teaching of spelling is based upon the teaching of morphology and etymology to allow the children to combine this with their knowledge of phonology to achieve orthography. This is taught through 'Spelling with Grammarsaurus'.



11. Inclusion

We aim to provide for all children so that they achieve as highly as they can in writing tasks according to their individual abilities. SEND children and New Arrivals Children who are new to English are given a variety of scaffolds to support their writing including:

- sentence starters
- vocabulary mats
- key visuals
- Colourful Semantics
- extra oral rehearsal
- whiteboards
- substitution tables

Adaptation of the task should be made when the whole class task is inappropriate for new arrivals.

Gifted children are challenged to extend their writing as far as possible through targeted feedback.

12. Monitoring

Teaching and learning in writing is monitored by English co-ordinators, the SLT and MLT through:

- English book monitoring
- Topic book monitoring
- Lesson visits and observations
- Pupil voice