



# Handwriting: Getting ready to write

## Driver Youth Trust

### What's the idea?

Failure to develop efficient and legible handwriting in primary school can have negative consequences for academic achievement and self-esteem (Feder and Majnemer, 2007). The physical demands of writing increase as children progress through school, making it essential that children learn effective habits to increase or maintain legibility and speed.

### What does it mean?

Handwriting is a complex task involving many components such as fine motor control, visual perception, in-hand manipulation and sustained attention. Typically, the quality of children's handwriting legibility and speed develops quickly when children are aged six to seven years. By age nine, most children

can write automatically and most will continue to improve their speed as they progress through school.

However, between 10 per cent and 30 per cent of school-age children have difficulties in developing their handwriting (Feder and Majnemer, 2007). For some of these children, these difficulties are due to neurodevelopmental disorders such as dyspraxia. However, there are also children whose handwriting is negatively affected by classroom-based factors.

### What are the action points for teachers?

1. Teachers should ensure that children have learned that to write legibly and with speed, they should be seated with their feet flat on the floor, with their hips and lower back supported against the chair back.

2. Chairs and desks should be as close to optimal size as possible, so that knees can be bent to 90 degrees with the lower leg perpendicular to the floor. The back should be straight, with forearms resting comfortably on the table.

3. Pencil grips are difficult to change once developed; whilst the tripod grip is considered optimal as it limits strain of the hand, other grips may be used effectively provided the child can see the pen/pencil tip from an upright position.

4. The hand should ideally be positioned parallel to the edges of the writing paper, so that there is minimal movement required to write across the paper. The arms should create a circle shape, enabling easy breathing. The non-writing hand should steady the writing paper, ideally just above the height of the writing hand.

**THE DRIVER YOUTH TRUST IS A CHARITY COMMITTED TO IMPROVING THE OUTCOMES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO STRUGGLE WITH LITERACY.**

### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

» Feder KP and Majnemer A (2007) Handwriting development, competency, and intervention, *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* (49)4: 312–317.

» James KH, Engelhardt L (2012) The effects of handwriting experience on functional brain development in pre-literate children. *Trends in Neuroscience and Education* 1(1): 32–42.